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ABSTRACT

This report focuses on the involvement of parents in local projects funded under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act. It researches the kind and extent of involvement, the impact of state and local factors on it, and the effect of the change from Title I to Chapter 1 on involvement in decisionmaking. Among the conclusions were the following: (1) the general lack of substantive influence of parents on program decisions is due, in part, to constraints inherent in local project operations; (2) the drop in the number of formal parent councils that occurred when Title I was replaced by Chapter 1 did not translate into an equally drastic reduction in parent participation; (3) state factors had only a minimal influence on local parent involvement activities, but local factors appear to be much more influential; (4) under Title I many districts ran programs designed to engage parents in their children's learning, and this practice has continued under Chapter 1; and (5) districts were much more likely to involve parents as tutors with their own children at home than they were to bring parents into the classroom to assist in the instructional process. The implications of the findings for Federal policy are discussed. Data are illustrated on 27 tables. A list of 37 references is included. (BJV)

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN LOCAL CHAPTER 1 PROGRAMS

December 1987

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I INTRODUCTION

Attempts over the last two decades to fashion effective compensatory education strategies for disadvantaged youth have consistently included components designed to increase the involvement of parents. Educational success is associated with familial and community support, but traditional modes of access to the schools (e.g., parent teacher associations and parent/teacher conferences) appear ineffective in attracting poor and ethnic minority parents (McLaughlin and Shields, 1987). Effective educational interventions, it is argued, must reach out to parent and child alike. Children need their parents' support and assistance if they are to succeed; teachers and administrators need parent input if they are to develop appropriate curricular and pedagogical strategies.

Beginning with the Head Start program (1964), federal policymakers included parent involvement requirements in nearly every major piece of legislation directed at disadvantaged students. Head Start required the formation of policymaking groups made up, in part, of parents of the students served. Similar mandates for the organized participation of parents appeared in Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), Follow Through (1967), the Bilingual Education Act (1968), and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975).

This report focuses on the involvement of parents in local projects funded under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and its successor, Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA). Title I/Chapter 1 programs are especially appropriate for study because of their size (the largest federal effort in elementary and secondary education) and their breadth (over 90% of the nation's school districts participate in the program).

Moreover, the participation of parents in local Title I/Chapter 1 programs has long been a central concern of Congress. Since 1965, Congress

and the United States Office of Education (USOE, now the Department of Education) have regularly altered the parent involvement mandates as they grappled with the tough problem of finding effective and politically palatable requirements. The original Title I legislation (PL 89-10) did not mention parents specifically, but rather called for local project applications to be developed in coordination with the local community action program (which was established under the Economic Opportunity Act). The Commissioner of Education did, however, issue guidance to local districts urging them to involve the parents of students served with federal dollars. In 1968, USOE required the "maximum practical involvement" of parents and recommended the establishment of formal parental advisory councils. In the 1970 Technical Amendments to the legislation (PL 91-230), Congress empowered the Commissioner to require districts to involve parents; and in 1971 the Commissioner issued regulations requiring the establishment of district-level councils. In 1974, Congress again strengthened the parent involvement mandate by requiring councils at the school level as well (PL 93-380). The 1978 Technical Amendments to the legislation (PL 95-561) specified broad areas of responsibility for the councils and outlined the exact type of support that districts and states were expected to provide.

In 1981, Congress reversed this trend toward more specific requirements. With the enactment of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (PL 97-35), Title I became Chapter 1 and the various requirements were eliminated and replaced with a simple statement calling for "consultation with parents and teachers." In part as a response to criticism that such language was overly ambiguous, Congress included wording in the 1983 Technical Amendments that required local districts minimally to hold one annual meeting for parents (PL 98-211).

Previous Research

Regardless of the specificity of federal rulemaking, however, research on the Title I program has consistently found significant variation in both the quantity and quality of parent participation in local projects. The first analysis of the Title I program carried out by the U.S. Office of

Education in 1966 found that, although some local education agencies had successfully coordinated the planning and implementation of the local program with community groups, there was evidence that such coordination had not taken place in many localities (USOE, 1966). Similarly, the most influential early evaluation of the program noted that in many school districts, parent and community participation was virtually nonexistent (Martin and McClure, 1969). It was partly in response to these findings that Congress created the authority for stricter requirements in the 1970 Amendments.

Major studies in the 1970s continued to find significant unevenness in the extent to which parents participated in the Title I program. Using data from 32 LEAs in 8 different states, Goettel and Kaplan (1977) found that the "quality and quantity of parent participation in decisionmaking about Title I varies more than any other area of Title I practices." Data from a nationwide survey of school districts and schools showed similarly wide variation in the nature of parent activities (National Institute of Education, 1978). For example, 50% of the districts surveyed reported involving parent advisory councils in evaluations of the program, while 40% responded that councils had no involvement in evaluation activities. More recent studies of Title I (Advanced Technology, Inc., 1983; Bessey, Brandt, Thompson, Harrison, Putman, and Appleby, 1982; Keesling, 1980; Knapp, Stearns, Turnbull, David, and Peterson, 1983; Melaragno, Lyons, and Sparks, 1981) have also underscored the general conclusion that parent participation in decisionmaking assumes broadly different forms in different districts. Initial studies of Chapter 1 have found that, although many districts have chosen to reduce or abolish formal mechanisms for the involvement of parents, participation still means very different things in different districts (McLaughlin, Shields, and Rezabek, 1985; Lawyers' Committee, 1984; Shields and McLaughlin, 1986).

Research Questions

In the present study we have explored the following questions:

(1) What opportunities exist for parents to participate in and influence decisionmaking for Chapter 1, and what is the nature and extent of their involvement?

(2) What has been the effect of the change from Title I to Chapter 1 on parent involvement in Chapter 1 decisionmaking?

(3) What effect do state and local factors have on parent involvement in Chapter 1 decisionmaking? (What differentiates districts with high parent involvement from those with relatively low parent involvement?)

(4) To what extent are parents involved in instructional activities, and what explains the nature and extent of their involvement?

Methods and Data Sources

To answer the above questions, we relied primarily on the following two data sources:

- A nationally representative mail survey of approximately 2,000 districts conducted during the middle of the 1985-86 school year by Research and Evaluation Associates, Inc., (REA) and Westat. Questions on Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act were developed for the survey and covered a range of topics, including parent involvement. Because of the large item pool, three versions of the questionnaire were developed. Most items on parent involvement were included in two of the three versions of the questionnaire, resulting in a sample size of approximately 1,300 districts for most analyses.

  The sample of districts was selected within a stratification grid defined by two variables: district size (enrollment) and poverty level (Orshansky percentile). Once the sample was selected, a systematic assignment of the three questionnaire versions was made. Although response to the survey was high (over 80% overall), the data were weighted to adjust for differences in nonresponse and sampling rates by strata. (See the appendix.)

- Site visits to 20 school districts in 11 states conducted during the middle of the 1985-86 school year by SRI International for our study on local program design and decisionmaking under Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act. The districts were chosen to vary on a number of dimensions, including these four primary criteria: the kind of instructional design operating in the Chapter 1 program, the extent and nature of changes made in the program's design over the preceding 5 years, district size, and student poverty level. A variety of staff were interviewed at the district and school levels, including district Chapter 1 staff, instructional administrators, the superintendent, school board members, school principals (in selected schools that illustrated the range of designs and design-related conditions within the district), teachers in the regular school program, Chapter 1 instructional staff, and parents

involved in an advisory capacity or who participated in instructional support roles. (See Knapp, Turnbull, Blakely, Jay, Marks, and Shields, 1986.)

Study Limitations

Although the data sources described above provided considerable information, neither was primarily intended to be used to study parent involvement in Chapter 1. Because the REA/Westat survey was designed to cover a range of topics concerning Chapter 1, the number of items on parent involvement was limited. The main purpose of the SRI case studies was to collect information with which to describe the process of making decisions at the local level, not parent involvement in Chapter 1.

Information collected in the REA/Westat survey represents district perceptions of parent involvement only. The SRI case study data include interviews with school-level personnel in all of the sites visited, and although parent representatives (e.g., the district advisory council chair) were interviewed in some sites, they were not interviewed in all sites. Also, no systematic efforts were made to interview parents active in Chapter 1.

Organization of the Report

The remainder of this report is organized into five sections. In the next section we discuss parental involvement in decisionmaking. The discussion begins with a description of the decisionmaking process for Chapter 1 and opportunities for parent involvement. In the remainder of the section, the extent and nature of parent influence on program design are discussed.

In the third section, changes from Title I to Chapter 1 are discussed. The section begins with a discussion of changes in the federal legislation, and then examines the effects of these changes by comparing the extent and nature of parent involvement in program design before and after Chapter 1.

The fourth section examines the extent to which various state factors (e.g., state guidelines, state encouragement and assistance) and local factors (e.g., attitudes of local program staff, district structures, the community context) are associated with variation in parent involvement in program design.

In the fifth section, we discuss the involvement of parents in the instructional process, both at home and in the school. In the last section, we discuss our findings and their implications for policymakers.

II PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN DECISIONMAKING

Both the Title I and Chapter 1 legislation focused on the involvement of parents in local-level decisions concerning the design and implementation of the federal education program. As we outlined in the previous chapter, Congress rewrote the requirements for parent involvement in each successive reauthorization of the legislation. Requirements varied from the specific mandates for parent councils in the 1978 Technical Amendments to the initial Chapter 1 language simply calling for "consultation" with parents. Yet, while there has been intense disagreement over the extent to which the federal government should mandate parent involvement in local decisions, the intent of Congress has remained relatively stable: to ensure that parents of children served by Title I/Chapter 1 are adequately informed about the program and that they be provided the opportunity to advise administrators on local program decisions. The goals of the involvement of parents in this advisory role have been to ensure program accountability and to improve the information on which program decisions are based.

In this chapter, we review our findings on the extent to which parents are involved in decisions in the Chapter 1 program at the local level. Before we do so, however, we describe the context within which parent participation as advisors takes place--that is, the Chapter 1 decisionmaking process. We outline the constraints and opportunities for participation inherent in this broader process.

The Context: The Chapter 1 Decisionmaking Process

The involvement of parents as advisors on program decisions is only one small part of a complex process of decisionmaking concerning local program design and implementation. The extent of parent influence is bounded by the characteristics of this broader process. In particular, the district's, school's, and program's style of decisionmaking, the requirements in federal

and state law, resource availability, and program tradition function to define the ways in which parents might influence program decisions. In this section, we review each of these four characteristics and outline how each constrains or provides opportunities for parent participation in advisory roles.

District, School, and Program Decisionmaking Style

The SRI case studies showed that the ways in which decisions are made concerning the Chapter 1 program vary widely among districts, and sometimes among schools within particular districts. In some sites, decisions are made by a few key players in the district office. In others, each school holds primary responsibility for the design of the program. Some districts follow a very formal process of decisionmaking, whereas in others, decisions are made through the informal interaction of relevant administrators. In some sites, decisions are driven by data collected as part of needs assessments or evaluations; in other districts, decisions are based on the opinions of a few key leaders; in still others, the decisionmaking process is very participatory, with teachers, administrators, and community members involved in committees that wield tremendous influence over the course of programs.

The ways in which the parents of Chapter 1 students might influence the program vary, depending on all of these characteristics. In one SRI case study site, for example, a new and highly regarded superintendent came into a district and undertook an extensive effort to revitalize the overall educational program of the schools, including a number of changes in the Chapter 1 program. The centralized, independent style that characterized the superintendent's actions left little room for input from school personnel and parents alike. In contrast, another case study site had a long history of strong community participation through ad hoc advisory committees on major issues facing the district. In this case, the more participatory style of district decisionmaking facilitated parent input into decisions relevant to Chapter 1.

Federal and State Requirements

The specific mandates in federal legislation and in state education agencies' interpretation of these mandates restricts how districts and schools can use Chapter 1 dollars. The federal legislation, for example, requires that federal funds be spent on supplementary basic educational services for the educationally deprived in schools of relatively high concentrations of poverty. This basic requirement limits the extent to which district and school personnel can alter the basic targeting of Chapter 1 dollars--and thus limits the influence parents can have over targeting decisions.

In contrast, other federal mandates, specifically those calling for needs assessments, consultation with parents, and evaluation of program results, provide an opportunity for parent involvement. These requirements do not ensure parent participation in any sort of advisory role, nor do they ensure that parents' ideas will be considered by administrators. They do, however, provide for specific public activities that parents might take advantage of to voice their concerns.

Resource Availability

The SRI case study analysis underscored the importance of resource availability in the decisionmaking process. In the absence of significant shifts in resources, program personnel are unlikely or unable to make substantial changes in many program areas. For example, we found that changes in the grade-level focus of districts' Chapter 1 programs were frequently contingent on an increase or decrease in funds. Consequently, even if an active parent group could convince program administrators of the value of starting a high school component, the administrators might find their hands tied by a lack of resources. At the same time, shifts in resources, especially if they are drastic, can force administrators to reevaluate their priorities, and thus offer an opportunity for parents to provide input into potential changes in program targeting or design features.

Program Tradition

The final relevant characteristic of program decisionmaking that bounds the potential influence of parents is program tradition. In most districts and schools, administrators do not redesign their program each year. Given relatively stable resources and the absence of major outside influences, program personnel tend to do this year what they did last year.

The lack of constant reexamination of the design of the program can foster a necessary continuity in program practice, but it can also help to build entrenched interests that might impede future changes. For example, a district that has traditionally allocated funds to as many schools as possible might find it difficult to concentrate greater resources on those schools with the highest concentrations of poor students. Removing a program from a school that has had it for a number of years can often create significant opposition. Similarly, changing service delivery arrangements (from in-class to pull-out, for example) might require changing staffing patterns. Laying off long-time instructional assistants to hire certificated teachers, for example, could also create problems for program administrators. Again, just as these factors limit administrator actions, so they limit the amount of influence parents can have over the program.

As we have noted, each of these characteristics of the local decisionmaking process can work to either inhibit or enhance the opportunities parents have to influence decisions concerning the Chapter 1 program. Taken together, however, these factors generally tend to constrain the influence of parents--in fact, many Chapter 1 directors in our case study sites often felt as though their own hands were tied in terms of changing the basic thrust of the program. Attempts to alter the targeting of Chapter 1 funds and services are limited by federal and state law and regulations, by resource constraints, and by traditional arrangements that create entrenched interests. Changes in either grade-level or subject matter focus are constrained by resources and program tradition. New service delivery model proposals that require staffing changes are quite difficult to implement because they entail the firing of program personnel.

Given these constraining characteristics, it is likely that parent influence over major program design issues would be minimal. And, in fact, major studies of both Title I and Chapter 1 have found that in most districts parents do not exercise significant influence over the course of the local program (National Institute of Education, 1978; Melaragno et al., 1981; Advanced Technology, Inc., 1983; Shields and McLaughlin, 1986). In the following section, we outline our findings from both the case study and the survey data concerning the involvement of parents in local program design decisions. We first discuss the various channels through which parents participate in program design decisions. We then describe the extent of parental influence in the decisionmaking process.

Channels of Involvement

Parent involvement in decisionmaking concerning the Chapter 1 program can take place in many different ways. Informal discussion with teachers and administrators is one possible form of parent input, but research has shown that parental influence is strongest when it takes place through formal channels. In this section, we discuss the various formal ways in which parents provide input into the program: district- and school-level advisory councils, other formal meetings, and parent surveys.

Advisory Councils

The traditional mechanism through which parents of Title I/Chapter 1 students have participated in the program has been through parent advisory councils (PACs). From the early 1970s to 1981, advisory councils were mandated by federal law as a way of ensuring a forum in which the views of parents and community members could be voiced. The REA/Westat survey found that 51% of districts had a formal advisory council for parents in 1985-86 (44% had a district advisory council, and 36% had one or more school advisory councils). (See Table II-1.) As we will discuss in Section III, this represents a significant decrease from Title I.

Table II-1

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DECISIONMAKING PROCESS

(Weighted Percentage of Districts; N = 641)

Had parent advisory councils	51
Had district advisory councils	(44)
Had school advisory councils	(36)
Held annual or periodic meetings	78
And had parent advisory councils	(45)
But did not have parent advisory councils	(33)
Conducted parent surveys	42
Conducted surveys only	(2)
Had no formal mechanisms for parent involvement	10

However, the survey data may underestimate the percentage of districts in which parents participate in advisory councils. Our case study data indicate that some districts consolidated advisory councils from various programs after the deletion of the requirement for them in Chapter 1 programs. For example, two Western districts consolidated their Chapter 1 council with those of other state programs designed to serve educationally disadvantaged students. In a large district in the Southwest, the district and school councils for different programs--including Chapter 1, Chapter 1 migrant, and bilingual education--and the PTA met together. Another district had created subcommittees of each school's PTA to deal with issues related to compensatory education. These subcommittees met before or after the regular PTA meeting when relevant issues arose. In each of these cases, parents continued to have an opportunity to participate in a formal advisory capacity--although the district may not have retained a council exclusively for Chapter 1 parents.

Other Meetings

Even in districts that do not have formal councils, parents often have the opportunity to participate in meetings regarding the Chapter 1 program. These meetings are usually set up to inform parents (as required by law) about the program, and if they are not coupled with parent involvement through other mechanisms, the extent to which parents may provide input is limited. Still, they represent a possible arena within which parents might let their feelings be known. The REA/Westat survey data show that 33% of districts held meetings for parents of Chapter 1 students even though they did not have parent councils. (See Table II-1.) Only 12% of the districts reported having neither a parent council nor special meetings for parents.

Parent Surveys

Districts frequently use formal mail surveys of parents to get their opinions on their Chapter 1 program. Surveys have the advantage of reaching beyond the usually small group of parents who attend council meetings regularly. Districts commonly use these surveys as part of their general needs assessment activities. In the REA/Westat survey, approximately 42% of the districts reported using parent surveys. In some of these districts, the surveys were only one of many ways parents provided input into the program. In 2% of the districts, parent surveys were the only formal mechanism for parent participation in the decisionmaking process.

Influence of Parents on Program Decisions

The participation of parents through councils, meetings, and surveys does not necessarily mean that parents are able to influence the program through these channels. For example, in our case studies we found advisory councils that played key roles in program decisions and others that had no influence whatsoever. At one extreme, in one large Southeastern district, parents were involved in every step of the decisionmaking process.

Here districtwide task forces, which included parents, were used to address major issues. The Chapter 1 advisory council retained veto power over any task force recommendations dealing with the compensatory education program. At the other extreme, a large Western district retained a council, but its meetings served solely as a forum for passing information from administrators to parents.

The participation of parents in surveys for needs assessment purposes is another area where involvement may or may not translate into influence. In our case study sites, surveys of parents for needs assessment were often pro forma and were not used seriously to plan the Chapter 1 program. Respondents in some districts we visited indicated that parent surveys were relied on only when they supported the decisions of the administration.

In other districts, although parent surveys did not lead to changes in the Chapter 1 program, they did cause the district to improve communication with parents. For example, one district, after surveying parents, decided to expand the content and circulation of its newsletter. Another district decided to hire a parent coordinator on the basis of parent input from a needs assessment survey, which had found that "the biggest complaint about Chapter 1 is the lack of understanding of the program."

In only a few case study districts were parent surveys influential in program design. In a large Western district, Chapter 1 school administrators routinely asked parents and staff to prioritize grades and skill areas for Chapter 1. After needs assessment data were collected, the principal met with the school advisory council chair and Chapter 1 teachers to discuss the parent and staff surveys. School and district administrators credited parents with convincing the district to provide Chapter 1 services for kindergarten and to provide Chapter 1 bilingual services. In a large Southern district, parent input into needs assessment caused the district to drop its math component and expand language arts. In a third district, parent input underscored the need to better integrate the Chapter 1 program with the regular instructional program.

Table II-2 presents findings from the REA/Westat survey on the extent of parent participation in various Chapter 1-related activities. Districts reported that parents were least involved in decisions concerning staffing (advising on hiring and monitoring of teachers) and school selection (advising on alternative methods of ranking attendance areas). The findings from the case studies are similar, and these results are not surprising. As we noted in the first section of this chapter, decisions concerning school selection are constrained by federal law and by program tradition, so that there is usually little room for parental influence in these areas. In most districts, the hiring of staff is considered a personnel decision in which a few high-level administrators participate. Additionally, in some districts unions exercise considerable influence over hiring decisions. However, in one large district, parents sat on the personnel selection committee for Chapter 1. Because of highly publicized low test scores, parents encouraged the district to upgrade its Chapter 1 staff and to hire bilingual teachers--and apparently the district followed the parents' advice. In a large Eastern district, parents were involved in selecting the district's community coordinator but not other Chapter 1 staff.

Districts reported significantly greater participation in program design decisions (selecting grade levels, subject areas, and curricular materials) and evaluation. The survey results show that 61% of districts involved parents in evaluation activities, but only 14% of the districts responded that such involvement was "substantial." Our case studies showed similar results. In many districts, parents participated in evaluation as observers. A common practice in Chapter 1 schools in a few districts was for schools to sponsor "walkarounds" in which Chapter 1 parents spent a day attending classes. Parents were then asked about their perceptions of their day in the school. In other districts, the involvement of parents was more formal: they were trained to observe classes and submit written reports as part of the evaluation exercise.

The picture for parent participation in program design decisions is similar. Over half the districts (54%) reported that parents advised on these decisions, but only 7% reported that this involvement was substantial.

Table II-2

EXTENT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN VARIOUS PROGRAM DESIGN AND EVALUATION ACTIVITIES DURING THE 1985-86 SCHOOL YEAR

(Weighted Percentage of Districts; N = 1,274)

Activity	Not at All Involved	Somewhat Involved	Substantially Involved	Don't Know/ Refused
Evaluating the program	37	47	14	2
Advising on design of the program (e.g., selecting grade levels, subject areas, curriculum materials)	45	47	7	1
Monitoring teachers	82	12	1	5
Advising on alternative methods of ranking school attendance areas	89	5	1	6
Advising on hiring of staff	91	3	1	5

Thirty-five percent of the districts said that parental concerns or preferences were a major influence in the last major design change made to the Chapter 1 program. Forty-six percent said parental concerns were a minor influence, and 13% reported that they were not an influence. (Approximately 5% of district administrators "did not know" what influence parental concerns had on their most recent program design change.)

In our case studies, the influence of parents over most program design decisions was minimal in most sites. We found no examples of parent influence over delivery model decisions, although in one large district parents expressed concern about non-Chapter 1 students being served when in-class services were provided. Also, our data provide no examples of parent influence over decisions with respect to the use of computers or the selection of an appropriate skill-level focus for Chapter 1 programs. Parent input seemed

to have the greatest impact on grade-level focus. For example, in several districts parents pushed for the addition of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten Chapter 1 services. In still other districts, parents requested Chapter 1 services at the secondary level. Also, in a few districts parents played a role in selecting subject matter focus for Chapter 1, causing math services to be added in one district and dropped in another.

Summary

In this section, we have reviewed our findings concerning the involvement of parents as advisors in the Chapter 1 decisionmaking process. We began by describing those characteristics of the decisionmaking process that can work to either constrain or facilitate the participation of parents of Chapter 1 students. These factors included the local decisionmaking style, federal law and regulations and state interpretations of these, resource availability, and program tradition. We concluded that these factors, when working together, tend to constrain the amount of influence parents can have over decisions concerning the Chapter 1 program.

We then looked at the various ways that parents are involved in program decisions. We found that most involvement took place through one of three formal channels: advisory councils, special meetings, and parent surveys. In most districts, parents had the opportunity to participate through one of these channels; only 10% of the districts reported having no formal mechanisms.

Finally, we examined the extent of parental influence over program design decisions. Both our survey and case study data show that the influence of parents varied widely from district to district and from program area to program area. Both data sources revealed districts in which parents appeared to wield considerable influence over program decisions, and others in which parents seemed to have no input at all. Parents appeared to have the least influence in issues regarding staffing and targeting and most

influence in certain design features, such as grade-level focus. Overall, however, parents seemed to have a minimal influence over the Chapter 1 program in most districts and regarding most issues.

Our analysis leaves two questions unanswered. First, to what extent does parent participation in an advisory role in the Chapter 1 program differ from the Title I years--especially given the reduced requirements? Second, what state and local factors might help explain the wide variation across districts in the nature of parent participation in the program? We deal with these questions in the next two sections.

III CHANGES FROM TITLE I TO CHAPTER 1: EFFECTS OF THE FEDERAL LEGISLATION

The elimination of the numerous specific requirements for the involvement of parents constituted a major reversal of policy brought about by the Chapter 1 legislation. After 16 years of increasing the requirements for parental participation, Congress reversed itself and returned to a general mandate of consultation. Advocacy groups supporting increased authority for parents argued that such changes probably would signal the end to effective community participation in the federal compensatory education program (see, for example, Children's Defense Fund, 1984). Conversely, many school administrators welcomed the deletion of the requirements because they found parent councils and other activities to be both burdensome and unnecessary (McLaughlin et al., 1985).

As we noted in the previous section, the elimination of the specific mandates for parent participation has not resulted in the wholesale elimination of parent involvement. Parents remain involved in decisions concerning the Chapter 1 program in a number of districts, particularly large ones.

In this section, we take a closer look at changes from the later years of Title I to the first years of Chapter 1 in the ways that parents participate in local projects. We report data from the REA/Westat survey and our case studies on changes from Title I to Chapter 1. Also, we describe findings from two previous studies of Title I that asked questions on parent involvement similar to those asked in the REA/Westat survey. The first is a study of parental involvement under Title I, conducted by the Systems Development Corporation, that included a mail survey of a nationally representative sample of 129 school districts (Keesling, 1980). The second is the last major study of Title I, by Advanced Technology, Incorporated, which included a nationally representative sample of 1,793 school districts (Advanced Technology, Inc., 1983), of which 424 responded to questions related to parent involvement.

Parent Advisory Councils

The federal government mandated district advisory councils (DACs) from 1971 to 1982 and school advisory councils (SACs) from 1974 to 1982. Councils were devised as a formal mechanism to ensure the effective involvement of parents. As shown in Table III-1, nearly all districts receiving funds from the Title I program reported that they had established such councils. Under Chapter 1, advisory councils are no longer required; and, as noted earlier, over half of districts no longer support a formal advisory council at the district level.

Additionally, parent participation in DACs has declined in a number of districts during Chapter 1. In the REA/Westat survey, 25% of districts that retained their DAC reported that there was more parent participation in them during Title I than during Chapter 1. By contrast, only 12% reported that parent participation increased during Chapter 1. Still, the extent of participation in councils remained stable in a majority (54%) of districts retaining councils.

Table III-1

PERCENTAGE OF DISTRICTS WITH DACs

Title I (Keesling, 1980)	99.5
Title I (Advanced Technology, Inc., 1983)	94.0[a]
Chapter 1 (REA/Westat, 1986)	44.2

[a] Differences between the Advanced Technology, Inc., and Keesling studies are due to wording of the survey questions. Advanced Technology asked whether the district had a council that had met in the last year. Keesling simply asked whether the district had a council.

The effect of the legislation on formal councils appears to be even more significant at the school level. Whereas the great majority of Title I schools had advisory councils, only 38.4% retained them in the absence of a specific federal mandate. (See Table III-2.)

Table III-2

PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS WITH SACs

Title I (Keesling, 1980)	94.5
Title I (Advanced Technology, Inc., 1983)	83.6[a]
Chapter 1 (REA/Westat, 1986)	38.4

[a] Differences between the two Title I studies are due to differences in definition of schools eligible for councils. Keesling did not count schools that had fewer than 40 students because Title I regulations did not require such schools to have councils.

The Advanced Technology, Inc., study (1983) reported that the many federal requirements regarding the formation and operation of advisory councils placed a significant burden on local administrators, one that was not outweighed by its benefits in many districts. With the elimination of these requirements, it is not surprising that many districts chose to abolish formal advisory councils.

The elimination of parent councils in many districts and the reduction in the participation of parents in those districts that have maintained councils do not, in themselves, signify a reduction in parent input into decisions concerning the Chapter 1 program. In some districts, parent councils may have existed solely on paper for compliance purposes. In these districts, parents may never have had much influence over the compensatory education program (Shields and McLaughlin, 1986). Conversely, districts may have found other effective means for involving parents. In the following

section we examine the changes in the extent to which parents play an active role in the Chapter 1 program--whether through formal councils or other means.

Nature and Influence of Parent Involvement

SRI's case studies provided examples of a variety of different experiences following the change in federal regulations. Districts fall into three general categories: (1) those in which the nature of parent involvement did not change at all; (2) those in which parents were less involved under Chapter 1 than they had been under Title I; and (3) those in which parents were more involved than they had been under Title I.

Districts with No Change

A number of our case study sites experienced no significant change in the extent to which parents were involved in the federal compensatory education program. These included districts that had strong parent programs under Title I and retained them under Chapter 1, districts that retained councils, districts that eliminated them, and districts that combined Chapter 1 councils with other councils.

At one extreme, one large Southern district had long enjoyed an active parent involvement component, and neither parents nor district staff ever considered dropping councils or changing the way in which parents were involved. The old system worked well and the change in federal law had no effect. At the other end of the continuum, in one small Midwestern district, the Chapter 1 coordinator said, "We still have a DAC. It is poorly attended, doesn't do much, and never has."

Two large urban systems also chose to retain their advisory councils because they continued to provide political support to district administrators. In both sites there had been a significant decrease in the extent of parent involvement from the early years of Title I--when the district

councils were hotbeds of political activity--to the later years of Title I when most major political issues had been resolved (e.g., desegregation). Parent activities during Chapter 1, however, mirrored those during the later years of Title I.

At the same time, a few districts that dropped parent councils reported that their elimination had not affected parent involvement. In these cases, the DAC had not been very active under Title I. For example, one district administrator said, "Under Title I the district was repeatedly found out of compliance for not involving PACs in program decisionmaking. PACs were frustrating. Parents weren't involved in Title I, and they aren't involved in Chapter 1. Only now we worry about it less."

In some districts, parent advisory groups for different programs (e.g., Chapter 1, Chapter 1 migrant, Chapter 2, state compensatory education, state bilingual education) were consolidated at the district and school levels following the change in federal regulations. In some sites, this consolidation had little impact on parent involvement. One Chapter 1 coordinator claimed that "parents retained a voice in the Chapter 1 program, without duplication of effort" because the same parents participated in the different councils before they were consolidated. Another Chapter 1 coordinator commented that the consolidation had little impact because their parent advisory councils had not been active before, and they were not active now.

Districts with Less Parent Involvement

In other districts, parent involvement in decisions concerning the compensatory education program has decreased since the passage of Chapter 1. In some cases, districts chose to eliminate councils and other parent activities after they were no longer mandated by law. Some districts, however, reported that they cut back on their parent involvement components because of decreases in federal funds. Some districts retained their DAC but reduced its activities; some maintained the DAC but cut down on school councils.

We found a few sites in which the DAC was retained but its activities were scaled down. For example, in one district the Chapter 1 coordinator commented, "We still run a parent advisory program. Now it meets only once a year. Chapter 1 made no difference to the strength of the parent lobby here, but it gave us some permission to--well, to get lazy. We don't recruit parents as much as we should. De-emphasis on the national level filtered down to the state level and on to us." Parents on the DAC in the same district commented, "Then there were monthly PAC meetings. Chapter 1 teachers were always there. More parents were coming out. It was mandatory. You had to have them. People just got involved."

In another district, DAC membership decreased, and the DAC met less frequently (three times versus four or five times a year). The district continued to provide the DAC with information and to encourage parent participation; but, according to the Chapter 1 coordinator, "We let parents know it's no longer the law."

In some districts, the DAC was maintained but SACs were dropped or their role diminished. One large Midwestern district eliminated its SACs and parenting classes and workshops. According to the Chapter 1 director, "Parent involvement was always frustrating. Since Chapter 1, we do what we have to do to be legal, but parent involvement doesn't amount to much." In a large Southern district that eliminated its SACs, the Chapter 1 director said, "We're getting fewer parents because we're not beating the bush as much." In another large district, the Chapter 1 coordinator said that, since the SACs were eliminated, the DAC (which used to recruit from the SACs) no longer comprised a broad-based representation of parents. In a fourth district, which recently had adopted a new curriculum for its middle school math component without consulting the SACs, the SAC coordinator said, "In the past [before Chapter 1] the district would never have done that."

Some districts did not drop their DACs or SACs but curtailed other activities following the change in regulations. For example, in one district where parents used to be surveyed formally, resource teachers now got parent input informally through the DAC. A second district no longer employed parent coordinators to encourage parent involvement. In another district,

parents in the DAC used to attend regional conferences and were exposed to new and interesting program ideas that they shared with the district. Such trips were no longer supported by the district.

In one large district that consolidated its compensatory education council with the councils for other special programs (bilingual, migrant, etc.), the Chapter 1 coordinator noted that "our parent advisory councils are less effective now because their [parents'] interests are too diverse."

Districts with More Involvement Under Chapter 1

Only one of our case study sites fell into this last category. Here the chair of the district council said, "Parent participation in decisionmaking started with Title I. The district made no attempt to disband the SACs after Chapter 1. If anything, parents are more involved in decisionmaking. They used to be rubber stamps. They have grown with the program and become more aware." The parent services advisor in the same district said, "Parents are even more outspoken than they used to be," and the assistant Chapter 1 coordinator said, "There's no problem getting parents involved. They won't let go!"

Patterns of Involvement

REA/Westat survey data provide a similar pattern of change in parent involvement activities from Title I to Chapter 1. In a majority of districts, there was little change; in a significant minority of districts (ranging from one-sixth to one-quarter, depending on the area of involvement), parent participation decreased; and in a small minority of districts, parent participation actually increased. The survey provides information on parental involvement in needs assessment, program design, hiring, and evaluation. Below, we compare these findings with those from the major studies of parent involvement in Title I. Our comparisons among studies can only provide evidence of general patterns because each study asked slightly different questions and used slightly different response categories.

Program Design--The REA/Westat survey asked administrators to report on the extent of influence of parents in program design decisions (those dealing with grade levels, subject areas, materials, and program objectives). Comparison of the survey results with those from studies of Title I points to a decrease in the amount of parental involvement during Chapter 1 (Table III-3). Whereas the two Title I studies reported that between 19% and 22% of parents were not involved (or had "no input") in program design, the REA/Westat survey indicated that twice as many parents (45%) were not involved under the present law.

Table III-3

EXTENT OF PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON PROGRAM DESIGN

(Percentage of Districts)

	Not Involved	Somewhat Involved	Substantially Involved	Don't Know/ Refused
Title I (Keesling, 1980)[a]	22	77	1	0
Title I (Advanced Technology, Inc., 1983)[b]	19	73	8	0
Chapter 1 (REA/Westat, 1986)[c]	45	47	7	1

[a] Categories were: not involved; provided advice on or had joint decisionmaking responsibility; exclusive decisionmaking responsibility.

[b] Categories were: no input; made recommendations; initiated involvement.

[c] These are the same categories used in the survey.

Other data from the REA/Westat survey support this finding: 24% of districts reported that parents had been more involved in program design during Title I. By contrast, only 6% reported that they were more involved during Chapter 1. Nevertheless, a majority of districts (61%) reported that there has been no change in the amount of parent involvement in program design since Title I. (Approximately 9% did not know how parent involvement had changed.)

Needs Assessments--One area in which parents have traditionally been involved is the assessment of school and district needs in relation to compensatory education. Table III-4 provides a general picture of change over time. Keesling (1980) found that 31% of districts did not involve parents under Title I, whereas the REA/Westat survey shows a slightly lower figure (26%). It appears, however, that in the majority of districts, parents are still offered the opportunity to advise on needs assessment. Unfortunately, these data are not directly comparable, and they do not allow us to gauge the influence of parent input during Title I and Chapter 1.

Table III-4

EXTENT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN NEEDS ASSESSMENT

(Percentage of Districts)

	No Role	Advisory	Joint Decisions	Exclusive Authority
Title I (Keesling, 1980)	31	39	27	3

	No Role	Surveys or Meetings	Surveys and Meetings
Chapter 1 (REA/Westat, 1986)	26	40	34

Hiring Staff--Perhaps one of the most influential and powerful roles parents might play in the Chapter 1 program is in the hiring of program staff. Data from previous studies suggest that parents played a key role in hiring staff in very few districts under Title I. Data from the REA/Westat survey show that in 1985-86 parents still did not participate much in decisions concerning staff. In fact, it appears that parents had less of a voice than they may have had under Title I. (See Table III-5.) For example, 72% of districts in the Keesling survey reported that parents were not involved in hiring, compared with 91% in the REA/Westat survey.

Table III-5

EXTENT OF PARENTAL PARTICIPATION IN HIRING

(Percentage of Districts)

	Not Involved	Somewhat Involved	Substantially Involved	Don't Know/ Refused
Title I (Keesling, 1980)[a]	72	27	1	0
Chapter 1 (REA/Westat, 1986)[b]	91	3	1	5

[a] Categories were: not involved; provided advice on or had joint decisionmaking responsibility; exclusive decisionmaking responsibility.

[b] These are the same categories used in the survey.

Evaluations--As shown in Table III-6, there has been a slight decrease in the extent of parent involvement in evaluation under the existing law. The two Title I studies reported that in 21% to 24% of districts, parents were not involved (or had "no input") in program evaluation, whereas 37% of districts in the REA/Westat survey reported that parents were not currently involved in program evaluation.

Other data from the district survey indicate that parent involvement in program evaluations was stable for a majority of districts. Seventy percent

of districts reported that there has been no change in the extent of parent involvement in program evaluation under the present law. Fourteen percent of districts reported more parent involvement in program evaluation under Title I, whereas only 8% reported more parent involvement under Chapter 1. (Approximately 8% did not know how parent involvement had changed.)

Table III-6

EXTENT OF PARENTAL PARTICIPATION IN EVALUATION

(Percentage of Districts)

	Not Involved	Somewhat Involved	Substantially Involved	Don't Know/ Refused
Title I (Keesling, 1980)[a]	21	77	3	0
Title I (Advanced Technology, Inc. 1983)[b]	24	67	9	0
Chapter 1 (REA/Westat, 1986)[c]	37	47	14	2

[a] Categories were: not involved; provided advice on or had joint decisionmaking responsibility; exclusive decisionmaking responsibility.

[b] Categories were: no input; made recommendations; initiated involvement.

[c] These are the same categories used in the survey.

PACs and Parent Involvement

Previous research has shown that the mere existence of district- and school-level councils does not ensure the meaningful participation of parents in program decisions. The REA/Westat survey data appear to confirm this finding: although there was a precipitous drop in the number of councils,

there was only a moderate to minimal decrease in parent involvement as reported by district administrators.

If this conclusion is accurate, we would expect that the change in the extent of parental involvement from Title I to Chapter 1 would be generally the same in all districts, regardless of whether they had eliminated their councils. Table III-7 provides data from the REA/Westat survey that support this hypothesis. Most districts, regardless of whether they retained their DAC, reported no change in parental involvement in program design (59% to 64%), program operations (70%), and program evaluation (69% to 70%).

Table III-7

CHANGE IN PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAM DESIGN, OPERATIONS, AND EVALUATION, BY WHETHER DISTRICT RETAINED DAC

(Weighted Percentage of Districts)

Activity	Retained DAC in 1985-86: Yes (N = 642)	Retained DAC in 1985-86: No (N = 630)
Program design		
More during Title I	20	27
No difference	64	59
More during Chapter 1	8	4*
Don't know	7	10
Program operations		
More during Title I	15	15
No difference	70	70
More during Chapter 1	5	5
Don't know	9	9
Evaluation		
More during Title I	15	14
No difference	70	69
More during Chapter 1	8	7
Don't know	7	10

*$p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

Summary

The structure of parent involvement activities at the local level shows a clear effect of the change in the federal legislation. The deletion of the requirement for councils resulted in their direct elimination in the majority of districts. There appears, however, to have been a relatively moderate effect on the extent and nature of parent participation. And this effect may be attributable more to the signal from Washington that parent involvement is no longer important than to the actual changes in the wording of the legislation. Moreover, there are clearly other factors that may influence patterns of parent participation. In the next section we turn to a series of state and local factors.

IV STATE AND LOCAL FACTORS RELATED TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT

A key finding of our analysis is that a single federal mandate, that local districts "consult with" parents of students served with Chapter 1 funds, has been interpreted and implemented in significantly different ways at the local level. This finding is consistent with previous research on local implementation of federal education programs in general (Knapp et al., 1983) and with the research on parent involvement in local Title I and Chapter 1 programs (Melaragno et al., 1981; Shields and McLaughlin, 1986). Analysts of federal education policy have argued that federal rules and regulations are not translated directly into local-level actions. Rather, state education agency interpretation of federal intent and local political and institutional realities tend to shape federal policy as it moves through the three layers of government (Berman and McLaughlin, 1978).

In this section we turn our attention, then, to state and local factors that might help explain the variance in the extent to which parents participate as advisors in the local Chapter 1 program. First, we discuss the influence of state education agency guidelines and monitoring activities and local perceptions of state attitudes toward parent involvement in Chapter 1. Second, we discuss the influence of local factors including district actions and institutional support for parent involvement, attitudes of local program staff toward parent involvement, and the community context.

State Factors

Local administrators, especially in small districts where Chapter 1 directors may also function as principals or superintendents, often come to understand federal rules and regulations through the eyes of the state education agency (SEA). State interpretation of federal law as well as state

monitoring and enforcement practices can have a substantial impact on district-level perceptions of what is or is not allowable and thus affect local implementation (McDonnell and McLaughlin, 1982). For example, Melaragno et al. (1981) found that districts with active parent involvement programs were more likely to be located in states with strong and strictly enforced Title I guidelines. Bessey and her colleagues (1982) found that local administrators' attitudes toward the value of parent involvement tended to reflect the attitudes of state personnel.

In this section, we review our findings on SEA activities concerning parent involvement. Data for the analysis come from four sources: the REA/Westat survey, the SRI case studies, and two other OERI-commissioned studies--one carried out by Abt Associates, the other by REA. For the Abt study, interviews were conducted during 1985-86 with state Chapter 1 directors and staff and other SEA personnel in 20 states. (In 9 of the 20 states, data were collected in selected LEAs.) (See Farrar and Millsap, 1986.) For the REA study, telephone interviews were conducted during 1986 with state Chapter 1 directors in all 50 states.

The studies conducted for the national assessment provided evidence that state activities to involve parents have decreased since Title I. Following federal signals, most SEAs no longer require PACs and tend to view parent involvement as less important. Also, relatively few states do anything to monitor parent involvement in Chapter 1. Still, these studies did uncover some variation in state practice--in terms of both guidelines and assistance--regarding parent involvement in local programs. In this section, we examine the relationship between state activities and the extent of parent involvement in local Chapter 1 programs.

State Guidelines

In the REA 50-state survey, only 5 state Chapter 1 directors reported that their SEA required a PAC or an acceptable alternative. In the REA/Westat survey, districts in states that required a PAC or an acceptable

alternative were slightly (but not significantly) more likely to have a DAC (53% versus 42%) than were districts in other states, and they were somewhat more likely to have one or more SACs (58% versus 33%). (See Table IV-1.) Also, in the REA/Westat survey one of the main reasons districts gave for not having a DAC was that their SEA did not require one.

Table IV-1

WEIGHTED PERCENTAGE OF DISTRICTS THAT HAD STRUCTURES FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN DECISIONMAKING, BY STATE GUIDELINES

	State Required PAC or Acceptable Alternative	
	No (N = 1099)	Yes (N = 175)
Had DAC	42	53
Had one or more SACs	33	58**

**p < .01 (one-tailed test).

As shown in Table IV-2, districts in states that required a PAC or an acceptable alternative were slightly (but not significantly) more likely to say that parents were somewhat or substantially involved in advising on program design (61% versus 53%). However, they were significantly more likely to say that parents were a major influence on their last important program design change (52% versus 34%). Our case study sites included two districts in a state that required district councils or an alternative. In one of these sites, a medium-size district, administrators chose to combine the Title I parent council with all other special program councils, including the parents of students served with bilingual and migrant education funds. In the other site, the district chose to retain a separate district-level council for parents of Chapter 1 students.

Table IV-2

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAM DESIGN, BY STATE GUIDELINES

(Weighted Percentage of Districts)

	State Required PAC or Acceptable Alternative	
	No	Yes
Parent involvement in advising on program design		
Not involved	46	39
Somewhat involved	47	48
Substantially involved	6	13
Don't know/refused	1	1
	(N = 1099)	(N = 175)
Parent influence on last important design change		
Not an influence	14	17
Minor influence	47	27**
Major influence	34	52*
Don't know/refused	5	5
	(N = 1108)	(N = 171)

*p < .05 (one-tailed test).

**p < .01 (one-tailed test).

One reason state guidelines may not be more important is that very few districts perceived their state guidelines to be more restrictive than federal guidelines with respect to parent involvement (6%). Also, local program staff often were not aware of what the state required. Only 17% of districts located in states that required a PAC or an acceptable alternative perceived their state's guidelines to be more restrictive than federal rules or regulations. However, as shown in Table IV-3, districts that perceived their state guidelines with respect to parent involvement to be more restrictive than the federal rules or regulations were somewhat more likely to say that parents were somewhat or substantially involved in advising on program design (71% versus 52%) and that parents were a major influence on their last important program design change (47% versus 33%).

Table IV-3

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAM DESIGN, BY PERCEPTIONS OF STATE GUIDELINES

(Weighted Percentage of Districts)

	State Guidelines Perceived as More Restrictive than Federal Rules or Regulations	
	No	Yes
Parent involvement in advising on program design		
Not involved	46	29*
Somewhat involved	46	60
Substantially involved	6	11
Don't know/refused	1	0
	(N = 1194)	(N = 78)
Parent influence on last important design change		
Not an influence	16	5**
Minor influence	47	47
Major influence	33	47
Don't know/refused	3	1**
	(N = 598	(N = 41)

*p < .05 (one-tailed test).

**p < .01 (one-tailed test).

State Encouragement or Assistance

Perhaps more important than state guidelines is the extent to which state program staff communicate their support and try to help districts with the parent involvement component of their Chapter 1 program. For example, the influence of the SEA on parent involvement was particularly noticeable in two districts in one state in the SRI sample. State program staff helped local program staff in one district to conduct and evaluate parent surveys and to develop plans to involve parents in their Chapter 1 program. In another district in the same state, state program staff praised local program staff on a recent monitoring visit for their involvement of parents in the

district's Chapter 1 preschool program and encouraged local staff to involve parents in other components of their Chapter 1 program.

In the REA/Westat survey, 13% of districts said that their state had helped them in developing or improving the parent involvement component of their Chapter 1 program. Approximately 71% of districts that received help from their SEA said that parents were somewhat or substantially involved in advising on program design, compared with 52% of districts that did not receive help. (See Table IV-4.) Districts that received help were also slightly more likely to say that parents influenced their last important design change (89% versus 81%).

Other State Factors

The SRI case study data provided evidence that the SEA may indirectly affect parent involvement in Chapter 1 through state reform initiatives. Some states in the sample used the literature on effective schools to encourage "positive school climates" with the help of parent involvement. Districts in these states reported relatively high parent involvement in Chapter 1 program design. Also, even though another SEA did not require PACs for Chapter 1, it did require parent involvement for a newly enacted K-3 improvement program. The "fallout" of this requirement was expected to be more parent involvement in Chapter 1 program design.

In sum, the potential influence of state factors on parent involvement in Chapter 1 program design and decisionmaking is limited because relatively few SEA guidelines are more restrictive than federal guidelines concerning parent involvement. Also, relatively few SEAs help districts to involve parents in their Chapter 1 programs. The REA/Westat survey data provided evidence of a modest relationship between state factors and parent involvement in program design and change. The SRI case study data also provided examples of districts that were influenced by their SEA to involve parents in Chapter 1 program design, but these districts were influenced more by the attitudes toward and support provided by state program staff for parent

involvement than they were by SEA guidelines. For the most part, the studies conducted for the national assessment found that local factors were more important in explaining parent involvement than were state factors.

Table IV-4

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAM DESIGN, BY WHETHER THE STATE HELPED THE LEA WITH THE PARENT INVOLVEMENT COMPONENT OF ITS CHAPTER 1 PROGRAM

(Weighted Percentage of Districts)

	State Helped LEA with Parent Involvement	
	No	Yes
Parent involvement in advising on program design		
Not involved	47	28**
Somewhat involved	46	58*
Substantially involved	6	13*
Don't know/refused	1	1
	(N = 1119)	(N = 154)
Parent influence on last important design change		
Not an influence	16	6**
Minor influence	47	46
Major influence	34	43
Don't know/refused	3	4
	(N = 562)	(N = 79)

*p < .05 (one-tailed test).

**p < .01 (one-tailed test).

Local Factors

Local implementation of federal policy is often a process of "mutual adaptation" in which local administrators seek to both change local practice to comply with federal directives and adapt federal policy to local political and institutional realities (Berman and McLaughlin, 1978). Research has uncovered various local-level factors that affect how federal mandates are carried out in school districts. In terms of the participation of parents as advisors in the Chapter 1 decisionmaking process, the following factors have been found to be important: (1) attitudes of local program staff toward parent involvement in Chapter 1 program design, (2) district actions and institutional support for parent involvement in program design, and (3) the district or community context (e.g., the nature and size of the community served).

Staff Attitudes

Both the Abt and SRI case studies found parent involvement to be related to the commitment of local Chapter 1 staff and teachers. As noted in the previous chapter, local support for parent involvement has diminished since Title I. Nevertheless, the SRI case study data provided evidence that local program staff continue to differ in their attitudes toward parent involvement.

At the one extreme, program staff view themselves as "trustees" who, because of their expertise, are entrusted to make decisions that are in the best interests of Chapter 1 parents and their children. Parent involvement tends to be viewed as a "legal obligation." Although these administrators believe that good communication with parents is important, they do not believe that parents contribute much to the decisionmaking process. For example, an administrator in one large district said, "It is important to inform parents, but they should not have a major role in program design. Parents know what their children need, but it's the professionals' role to meet those needs."

In another district, the Chapter 1 coordinator said that Chapter 1 was not considered a separate program and most decisions for the program were made through normal district channels. He added, "Parents aren't especially involved in other district decisions; why should we involve them in Chapter 1?"

These "trustees" tend to believe that parent involvement is more important in helping kids at home than in helping the district. For example, one district superintendent said, "The effective administrator will encourage parent involvement, but the emphasis should be on instructional support." Although these administrators do not believe that parents can contribute much to the decisionmaking process, they tend to be protective of their clients. For example, the DAC chairperson in one district said of the former Chapter 1 coordinator, "She thought of us as her children. She brought us along, and there was no way she would let anybody mess with us."

At the other extreme, program staff in some districts believe that parents can contribute meaningfully to the decisionmaking process. They tend to view themselves as "representatives," rather than "trustees," who are responsible for soliciting and responding to parents' concerns and preferences. For example, in one large district parents were involved in every aspect of the Chapter 1 program. Although a task force of district and school administrators made recommendations concerning resource allocations and the design of Chapter 1 services, the DAC was allowed to review and even veto the task force's recommendations.

As one might expect, in our case study sample most district administrators adopted a role somewhere between that of trustee and representative. For example, an administrator in a large district said, "We have the time, expertise, and responsibility for decisionmaking, but we are open to suggestions." In another district, the Chapter 1 coordinator said "Our district's superintendents don't agree with parents, but they don't discourage parent involvement either."

Although these administrators encourage parent involvement in Chapter 1 program design, they often do not feel responsible when nothing happens. Their attitude is that "it's not our fault." For example, a Chapter 1 director said, "We've been struggling with that [parent involvement] for as long as I can remember. Let the children perform. Parents will come. That's it." A principal of a Chapter 1 school commented, "We've tried everything to get them [parents] out. Since we haven't been successful with the parents, we are going to concentrate on the kids." Another principal said he worked hard to get parents to attend Chapter 1 program design meetings, but expressed frustration because parents would say, "I don't know enough to be here." Other principals commented that parents were just too busy or too uninterested to participate effectively in Chapter 1.

The REA/Westat survey provided only a limited picture of administrators' attitudes. Administrators were asked to rank the following 10 categories of requirements in the existing Chapter 1 law and regulations with respect to necessity and burden: ranking and selecting project areas, ranking and selecting students, parent involvement (including advisory councils), needs assessment procedures, evaluation procedures, supplement-not-supplant provisions, maintenance of effort provisions, comparability procedures, nonpublic school student participation, and adequate size, scope, and quality provisions.

On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 indicated "most necessary" or "most burdensome," only 10% ranked parent involvement from 1 to 3 with respect to necessity, whereas 37% ranked it from 1 to 3 with respect to burden. On the other hand, 48% perceived the necessity of parent involvement to be greater than the burden, whereas only 24% perceived it to be less than the burden. Approximately 28% of districts ranked parent involvement similarly with respect to the two dimensions.

Using the REA/Westat data, we examined the relationship between administrators' necessity and burden rankings, and the extent to which parents in their district were involved in program design and change. (For this analysis, the distribution of districts was divided into thirds--high, middle, low--based on their rankings of parent involvement.)

As shown in Table IV-5, district administrators who ranked parent involvement most highly with respect to necessity were somewhat more likely to say that parents were somewhat or substantially involved in advising on program design (67% versus 48% to 50%) and that parents were a major influence with respect to their last important design change (48% versus 27% to 39%). On the other hand, burden rankings were not directly related to perceptions of parent involvement in program design.

Table IV-5

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAM DESIGN, BY ADMINISTRATORS' ATTITUDES

(Weighted Percentage of Districts)

	Perceived Necessity of Parent Involvement			Perceived Burden of Parent Involvement		
	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
Parent involvement in advising on program design						
Not involved	51	48	33*	44	41	55
Somewhat involved	42	44	59*	45	51	39
Substantially involved	6	6	8**	11	6	5
Don't know/refused	1	2	<1	0	2	1
	(N=439)	(N=526)	(N=235)	(N=359)	(N=491)	(N=301)
Parent influence on last important design change						
Not an influence	13	13	12	13	14	13
Minor influence	54	46	38**	45	48	49
Major influence	27	39	48*	41	36	32*
Don't know/refused	6	2	2	1	2	6
	(N=444)	(N=528)	(N=234)	(N=359)	(N=495)	(N=307)

*p < .05 (one-tailed test).

**p < .01 (one-tailed test).

Thus, although necessity rankings are somewhat related to parent involvement, the SRI case study data indicate that perceptions of whether parents can contribute meaningfully to the decisionmaking process are more

important. Interestingly, perceptions with respect to the necessity of parent involvement may have a greater indirect effect (e.g., by stimulating districts to form parent advisory councils) than a direct effect on parental influence. For example, 59% of districts with high necessity rankings had parent advisory councils, compared with 46% of those with middle rankings and only 28% of those with low rankings. (See Table IV-6.) In the next part we discuss the influence of district actions and institutional support on parent involvement in Chapter 1 program design.

Table IV-6

WEIGHTED PERCENTAGE OF DISTRICTS WITH STRUCTURES FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT, BY ADMINISTRATORS' ATTITUDES

	Perceived Necessity of Parent Involvement		
	Low (N = 439)	Medium (N = 526)	High (N = 235)
Had DAC	28	46	59**
Had one or more SACs	23	38	46**

**p < .01 (one-tailed test).

District Actions

Even more than staff attitudes, district actions (or the absence of them) may influence parent involvement in Chapter 1 program design. Below we discuss two types of district activities: (1) how districts describe their Chapter 1 program to parents and (2) other forms of district support, such as the establishment of structures for parent involvement (e.g., DACs and SACs) and the hiring of community coordinators to facilitate parent involvement.

Communication with Parents about Chapter 1--The more knowledgeable parents are about Chapter 1, the more one would expect them to be interested

and capable of participating in program design. As noted earlier, the major finding of parent surveys in some sites in the SRI sample was that a large percentage of parents did not know that their children were in Chapter 1, and those who did were not very familiar with the Chapter 1 program.

Districts rely on different people to communicate with Chapter 1 parents (e.g., district or school staff), the frequency with which they communicate with Chapter 1 parents (e.g., once or more per year), and the type of information they communicate (e.g., information on a child's progress, information designed to teach parents how to help their child at home, information about the content and nature of Chapter 1 services). However, most districts in the SRI case study sample could be classified into one of the following categories, based on how they described their Chapter 1 program to parents:

- Focus of communication is on child's progress. This group of districts relied almost entirely on school staff to communicate with Chapter 1 parents. The schools communicated with Chapter 1 parents primarily to inform them about the progress of their children (e.g., through postcard descriptions, parent-teacher conferences, and telephone calls). Some schools provided more general information on Chapter 1 through newsletters and PTA meetings.

- Focus of communication is on satisfying federal requirements. This group of districts held at least one annual meeting (usually at the beginning of the school year) to describe the basic features of the Chapter 1 program. District staff set the agenda for the meeting.

- Focus of communication is on parent training. This group of districts organized periodic parent meetings and parent workshops. A few had community liaisons, and a few paid for parents to attend regional conferences. The primary focus of the communication with parents was to teach parents how to help their children at home.

- Focus of communication is on educating parents about Chapter 1 services. This group of districts organized periodic parent meetings or communicated with parents through their PACs. A few had community liaisons. Parents were informed about the nature and content of Chapter 1 services in order (1) to educate them, (2) to ensure that they were satisfied with the services provided, and (3) to enable them to participate effectively in Chapter 1 needs assessments, program design, and evaluation.

Not surprisingly, parents in the last group of districts participated the most in Chapter 1 program design.

In the REA/Westat survey, districts were also asked to indicate the ways they described their Chapter 1 program to parents of eligible school children in the 1985-86 school year. Only 15% of districts reported that they allowed schools to decide how to inform parents or that they relied solely on teacher-parent meetings. Approximately 33% of districts reported that they held a special annual meeting to inform parents about their Chapter 1 program. The remaining 53% said that they held special meetings periodically throughout the school year to discuss their Chapter 1 program or that they informed parents through district or school advisory councils.

As shown in Table IV-7, districts that held special meetings periodically throughout the school year or that informed parents through district or school advisory councils were considerably more likely than districts that let schools decide how to inform parents about Chapter 1 or that relied solely on teacher-parent meetings to say that parents were somewhat or substantially involved in advising on program design (62% versus 24%) and that parents were a major influence on their most recent important program change (39% versus 15%).

Local Structures and the Use of Parent Coordinators--Local institutional arrangements, such as parent councils and meetings, and the use of parent coordinators can enhance parent participation by increasing access to Chapter 1 program staff and by increasing parents' perceptions that their participation will make a difference (Shields and McLaughlin, 1986). As noted in Sections II and III, fewer districts had formal structures for parent involvement, such as DACs or SACs, under Chapter 1 than had them under Title I. Also, relatively few districts had community liaisons.

Table IV-7

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAM DESIGN, BY HOW PARENTS WERE INFORMED ABOUT CHAPTER 1

(Weighted Percentage of Districts)

	Let School Decide or Relied on Parent-Teacher Meetings	Held Special Annual Meeting	Held Periodic Meetings or Used DACs/SACs
Parent involvement in advising on program design			
Not involved	74	45	36**
Somewhat involved	21	50	53**
Substantially involved	3	4	9**
Don't know/refused	2	<1	1
	(N = 111)	(N = 328)	(N = 815)
Parent influence on last important design change			
Not an influence	43	8	15**
Minor influence	41	53	43**
Major influence	15	37	39**
Don't know/refused	1	3	2**
	(N = 53)	(N = 172)	(N = 404)

**p < .01 (one-tailed test).

Districts in the SRI case study sample could be grouped as follows:

- Districts that had active parent councils. In these districts DACs were actively involved in reviewing district decisions regarding Chapter 1. For example, in one medium-size Eastern district the DAC consisted of various committees that worked on areas such as needs assessment, program planning, and grievance procedures. In a large Southern district, the DAC had an elected executive committee that met monthly and reviewed all program changes.

- Districts that had inactive parent councils. In these districts, the DACs met only a few times a year. They existed primarily to fulfill perceived legal requirements or to fulfill a public relations or community outreach function, providing parents with information about the Chapter 1 program and other "news items." Usually local administrators set the agenda for advisory council meetings. For example, in one large Southwestern district, the past three meetings had focused on the following topics: what was learned at a regional reading

conference, results of the state audit of their Chapter 1 program, and parent monitoring. In another district, the last two meetings included lectures on Gramm-Rudman and the Felton decision.

- Districts that did not retain their parent councils.

Not surprisingly, districts in the first group tended to have more parent involvement than those in the latter two groups. However, even in those districts in which DACs actively discussed Chapter 1 program design, often the DAC was reactive rather than proactive. For example, the DAC in a large Southern district questioned a number of administrative decisions over the past 5 years (e.g., changes in grade-level focus). However, in each case the DAC accepted the administration's decision after the rationale was explained. In another large district, the Chapter 1 coordinator said that the DAC came up with some good ideas but did not tend to be very critical unless Chapter 1 services were going to be dropped from a school or in some other way reduced. Despite the tendency for DACs to ratify district decisions, in a few districts the DAC influenced Chapter 1 program design.

Within districts, the level of SAC activity often varied by school. In one Southwestern district, some SACs met monthly and some met only once or twice a year, depending on parent interest. In many schools, the SACs were primarily recipients of information and did not appear to have any influence on program design decisions. However, in some schools SACs or their equivalent participated in needs assessments and planning and evaluation committees and signed off on their school's Chapter 1 application to the LEA.

As noted earlier, the use of parent coordinators also differed. For example, in schools in one large district parent coordinators were used to inform parents about Chapter 1 by telephone or by preparing and sending materials to parents' homes and to arrange transportation and babysitting so that parents could attend meetings concerning Chapter 1. In other schools in the same district, parent coordinators were used primarily as a teacher's

aide to perform menial tasks (e.g., to decorate the billboards, to run the ditto machine, and so on) rather than to coordinate parent activities.

Using the REA/Westat data, we examined the relationship between having a DAC, SAC, and parent coordinator and parent participation in Chapter 1. As shown in Table IV-8, districts that had a parent coordinator were more likely to say that parents were substantially involved in advising on program design (23% versus 6%). They were also slightly more likely than other districts to say that parents had some influence on their most recent important program change (89% versus 82%).

Table IV-8

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAM DESIGN, BY DISTRICT SUPPORT STRUCTURES

(Weighted Percentage of Districts)

	Had Parent Coordinator		Had DAC		Had One or More SACs	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Parent involvement in advising on program design						
Not involved	46	21**	53	34**	51	37*
Somewhat involved	47	53	41	55**	42	54*
Substantially involved	6	23**	4	10**	6	9
Don't know/refused	1	4	2	1*	1	<1
	(N=1082)	(N=149)	(N=630)	(N=642)	(N=695)	(N=519)
Parent influence on last important design change						
Not an influence	15	7**	16	15	14	17
Minor influence	46	58*	44	47	51	41
Major influence	36	31	36	36	31	39
Don't know/refused	4	4	4	2	3	3
	(N=1083)	(N=143)	(N=327)	(N=313)	(N=351)	(N=264)

*p < .05 (one-tailed test).

**p < .01 (one-tailed test).

Districts that had a DAC were somewhat more likely to say that parents were somewhat or substantially involved in advising on the design of their program (65% versus 45%), but they were not significantly more likely to say that parents influenced their most recent important program change. Similarly, districts that had one or more SACs were somewhat more likely to say that parents were somewhat or substantially involved in advising on program design (63% versus 48%).

Thus, having formal structures, such as DACs and SACs, does not ensure parent involvement in program design and decisionmaking. As indicated in the SRI case study data, how often DACs and SACs meet, how well they are attended, and how they are used by the district is a better predictor of parent involvement.

Overall District Supportiveness

Formal structures may have a more positive influence when they are accompanied by other district actions and attitudes supporting parent involvement. To test this hypothesis, we used the REA/Westat data to classify districts into the following three groups based on their overall support for parent involvement:

- Highly supportive districts. Districts that have at least one institutional arrangement for parent involvement in Chapter 1 (e.g., a DAC, SAC, or parent coordinator), that make formal efforts to inform parents about Chapter 1 periodically during the school year (e.g., through meetings or their DACs or SACs), and that view parent involvement as highly necessary (on a scale of 1 to 10, they rank it 1 to 3).

- Minimally supportive districts. Districts that do not have a DAC, SAC, or parent coordinator for Chapter 1, that rely on schools to inform parents about Chapter 1 (e.g., through parent-teacher conferences), and that view parent involvement as not very necessary (on a scale of 1 to 10, they rank it from 8 to 10).

- All other (moderately supportive) districts.

Only 6% of districts were in the first (highly supportive) group, and only 4% fell into the second (minimally supportive) group, whereas 90% were in the third (moderately supportive) group. As shown in Table IV-9, although the sample sizes were small, the differences in parent involvement were dramatic between the minimally and highly supportive groups.

Table IV-9

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAM DESIGN, BY DISTRICT SUPPORTIVENESS

(Weighted Percentage of Districts)

	Minimally Supportive Districts	Moderately Supportive Districts	Highly Supportive Districts
Parent involvement in advising on program design			
Not involved	77	45	20**
Somewhat involved	17	47	67**
Substantially involved	6	6	13**
Don't know/refused	0	1	<1
	(N = 35)	(N = 1151)	(N = 88)
Parent influence on last important design change			
Not an influence	32	15	7
Minor influence	33	47	37
Major influence	35	34	55**
Don't know/refused	1	3	1
	(N = 16)	(N = 580)	(N = 45)

**p < .01 (one-tailed test).

Only 23% of districts in the minimally supportive group said that parents were somewhat or substantially involved in advising on program design, compared with 80% of districts in the highly supportive group. Clearly, staff attitudes and district actions can work together to enhance parent involvement.

Community Context

The extent to which parents of Chapter 1 students are involved as advisors in the program's decisionmaking process may also be influenced by the nature of the local community. For example, one consistent finding of the research on parent participation has been that parent councils and other activities that involve parents in decisionmaking tend to be stronger and more influential in larger districts (Melaragno et al., 1981; Advanced Technology, Inc., 1983; McLaughlin et al., 1985). Yet the absolute size of a particular district may be only one factor influencing the nature of parent participation. Large districts also tend to be urban, to have relatively higher proportions of minority groups, and to have relatively higher concentrations of poverty than do small rural districts. In this section, we outline our findings on the relationship between parent involvement and these various community factors: size, importance of minority groups, and poverty concentration.

Size of the Community Served--The Abt and SRI case studies, as well as the REA/Westat survey, all found parent involvement in decisionmaking to be stronger and more influential in larger districts. For example, of the seven districts in the SRI study in which parents retained an effective voice in program decisions, five had enrollments over 25,000 students and all seven had enrollments over 10,000. In contrast, in no district with fewer than 10,000 students did parents play an influential role in the decisionmaking process. The REA/Westat survey also showed that large and very large districts were most likely to report that parents were somewhat or substantially involved in advising on program design (76% versus 66% for medium-size districts and 49% for small districts). However, district size was not significantly related to parent influence with respect to districts' most recent program design change. (See Table IV-10.)

The simplest explanation for the importance of district size is the absolute size of the pool of potentially participating parents. It might be easier to get 40 or 50 parents active in a program serving 10,000 students than in one serving a few hundred. The SRI case studies also underscored the importance of the complexity and formality of decisionmaking in large

districts. Districts with large Chapter 1 programs serving many schools tend to make decisions through a formal and complex process--one that often includes public hearings, task forces, and other mechanisms that provide parents an opportunity to give their opinions on district actions.

Table IV-10

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAM DESIGN, BY DISTRICT SIZE (ENROLLMENT)

(Weighted Percentage of Districts)

	Very Small/Small (Less Than 2,500)	Medium (2,500 to 9,999)	Large/Very Large (10,000 or greater)
Parent involvement in advising on program design			
Not involved	49	34	24**
Somewhat involved	45	54	53**
Substantially involved	4	12	23**
Don't know/refused	2	<1	<1
	(N = 357)	(N = 551)	(N = 366)
Parent influence on last important design change			
Not an influence	15	14	12
Minor influence	46	45	44
Major influence	34	37	39
Don't know/refused	5	5	5
	(N = 362)	(N = 555)	(N = 362)

**p < .01 (one-tailed test).

The SRI case studies show, however, that district size by itself may not be the key determinant of parent participation. For example, we found that in large, predominantly rural districts, parents tended to play a minimal role in the decisionmaking process. It was in the large urban districts that parents were most active. Large urban districts also tend to have large populations of minorities and high concentrations of poverty. We discuss each of these next.

Poverty Concentration--Districts' Chapter 1 allocations are based on the extent of poverty in the community. The poorer the community, the larger the allocation of funds and thus the larger the number of students and schools eligible for services. In poorer communities, then, the Chapter 1 program may be politically more important than in relatively wealthier districts. We would expect there to be a greater likelihood of community involvement in a politically salient program than in one that has little importance in the district.

As shown in Table IV-11, only 30% of high-poverty districts in the REA/Westat survey said that parents were not involved in advising on program design, compared with 42% of medium-poverty districts and 53% of low-poverty districts. However, poverty concentration was not directly related to parent influence on districts' last important design change. Our case studies

Table IV-11

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAM DESIGN, BY POVERTY CONCENTRATION

(Weighted Percentage of Districts)

	Low (Less Than 12%)	Medium (12% to 24%)	High (25% or More)
Parent involvement in advising on program design			
Not involved	53	42	30*
Somewhat involved	40	50	59
Substantially involved	6	7	10
Don't know/refused	1	1	1
	(N = 646)	(N = 463)	(N = 165)
Parent influence on last important design change			
Not an influence	13	14	17
Minor influence	44	51	41
Major influence	40	30	34
Don't know/refused	4	5	8
	(N = 632)	(N = 478)	(N = 169)

*$p < .05$ (two-tailed test).

generally supported this conclusion--the districts in which parents played the most active roles had medium or high concentrations of poverty. A number of small, rural districts with high poverty counts, however, did not have active parent programs.

Minority Group Representation--Previous studies have shown that Title I advisory councils often provided a forum in which certain groups that had previously felt unrepresented in school district decisions could air their concerns (Shields and McLaughlin, 1986). In many districts, the Title I program frequently focused funds on poorer schools in predominantly minority (black and Hispanic) communities. The Title I program was seen as the minority community's program, and the politics of the Title I council reflected the ethnic politics of the district.

Data from the REA/Westat survey are generally consistent with this argument. Table IV-12 shows that districts with 25% or lower minority enrollment were significantly less likely than districts with higher concentrations of minorities (more than 25%) to report that parents were somewhat or substantially involved in advising on program design and change (49% to 52% versus 75%). However, minority enrollment was not directly related to parent influence on districts' last important design change.

In the SRI case studies, all districts with active parent programs had relatively high concentrations of minority group members (more than 25%), whereas no district with 25% or lower minority enrollment had active parent involvement in an advisory capacity.

Taken together, these three community factors create a picture of a community in which parent participation is most likely to be active, structured, and influential. A large, urban district with a high concentration of poverty and a significant minority population is more likely to have meaningful participation of parents in the decisionmaking process than is a small, rural, ethnically homogeneous community. The larger and poorer a district is, the more likely the Chapter 1 program is to be a politically salient program in which decisions are made through a formal process. In

Table IV-12

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PROGRAM DESIGN, BY PERCENTAGE MINORITY

(Weighted Percentage of Districts)

	Low (5% or Less)	Medium (6% to 25%)	High (More Than 25%)
Parent involvement in advising on program design			
Not involved	49	48	24**
Somewhat involved	45	45	58*
Substantially involved	4	7	17**
Don't know/refused	2	<1	1
	(N = 503)	(N = 415)	(N = 354)
Parent influence on last important design change			
Not an influence	12	25	13*
Minor influence	45	43	50
Major influence	38	28	33
Don't know/refused	6	4	4
	(N = 491)	(N = 422)	(N = 364)

*p < .05 (two-tailed test).

**p < .01 (two-tailed test).

districts where there is a significant minority group that has been underrepresented in the past, that group is likely to seize the federal program as a channel for its concerns about the course of the schools.

Yet the various community factors do not translate directly into strong parent involvement components. For example, two SRI case study sites with high concentrations of poverty and minorities (one of which was also large) reported minimal involvement of parents in decisionmaking roles. In both cases, the relevant minority groups were unorganized and did not play a role in district politics. One district covered a large rural area in which parents lived far apart and far from the central district offices. In the other, the minority group consisted of large numbers of migrant workers who tended to move in and out of the district.

In a number of larger districts, well-organized minority groups had at one time been quite active in the Title I parent councils, but have since succeeded in gaining a voice through the normal decisionmaking process of the district. In one case, the leader of the black community, who had been an outspoken president of the Title I DAC, was elected to the school board and helped to carry through a desegregation policy that provided increased funds for schools in the black neighborhood. In another case, a black superintendent was hired and a desegregation decree remedied many of problems the black community had been raising in the Title I council. In both these cases, the Chapter 1 council was much less active than it had been under Title I, reflecting diminished conflict between a minority community and the schools.

In other cases, minority parents have focused their attention on the desegregation issue. For example, in one site, well-organized Hispanic parents fought to ensure that schools affected by a desegregation program did not receive Chapter 1 funds--the parents wanted to make sure that the district used its own resources to improve the schools. Thus, although this district enjoyed a strong program of parent involvement in the schools, that involvement was centered on the newly desegregated schools--not on the Chapter 1 program.

Summary

The studies conducted under the national assessment of Chapter 1 found significant variation in the extent to which parents are involved in local projects' decisionmaking. In this section, we examined the influence of state and local factors on parent involvement. In general, we found the influence of state factors to be small. This finding may be a function of the fact that few SEAs' guidelines are more restrictive than federal rules and regulations (or are perceived that way by local administrators) and that relatively few SEAs help districts with the parent involvement component of their Chapter 1 program.

Local factors appear to be more important in influencing the nature of parent involvement activities. This finding is strongest at the extremes--that is, in the most and least supportive districts. Our analysis also suggests that specific aspects of the community create a context that may be more or less conducive to the meaningful participation of parents in the Chapter 1 decisionmaking process. Large urban districts with relatively high concentrations of poverty and minority group members tended to report higher levels of parent involvement. In many of these districts, the Chapter 1 program was politically important, and minority groups have used the council structures as a channel to participate in district decisions.

Considered together, the studies conducted for the national assessment indicate that parent involvement is most likely under the following conditions:

- Local program staff believe that parents can meaningfully contribute to Chapter 1 program design and that it is their job to represent (not just protect) parents' interests.
- The district makes efforts to communicate (through periodic meetings or parent councils) information about the content and nature of Chapter 1 services.
- The district uses a parent council or parent coordinator to involve parents in Chapter 1 program design.
- The district is located in a large urban area with a relatively high concentration of minority group members who traditionally have participated in the Title I parent council.

Conversely, parent involvement is least likely under the following conditions:

- Local program staff believe that it is their job to protect (rather than represent) the interests of parents and that parents cannot meaningfully contribute to program design.
- The district relies on schools to inform parents about Chapter 1 or communicates infrequently with parents. Communication with parents is primarily about their children's progress or about how they can help their children at home.
- The district does not have formal structures for parent involvement (DACs or SACs) or has them for public relations purposes only. They meet infrequently and are not used to encourage parent involvement.

- The district is small, located in an ethnically homogeneous rural area, does not tend to involve many persons in Chapter 1 program design, and does not have a tradition of parent involvement.

V PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN INSTRUCTION

In the previous sections we have focused exclusively on the involvement of parents in decisionmaking. In this section, we turn our attention to a second broad role of parents--as participants in the instructional process. Parent involvement in instruction usually takes place in one of two ways. In the first, parents work with their children outside the formal setting of the school. In the second, parents work in the school as volunteers or instructional assistants. In this second form, parents usually work with many children, among whom their own child may or may not be included. In either case, parents can play a wide variety of roles, ranging from actually teaching (as tutors of their own children at home or of individual or groups of children in the classroom) to providing support (ensuring that their children have a quiet place to study or running off copies for a certificated teacher).

Congress has never mandated an instructional role for parents in either the Title I or Chapter 1 legislation. There is, however, a long history of educators' attempts to get parents (especially lower-socioeconomic-status parents) more involved in their children's learning (Scholssman, 1976). And other major federal education programs, most notably Head Start, have required the involvement of students' parents in the instructional process (see Zigler and Anderson, 1979; Keesling and Melaragno, 1983). The importance of the parent/child relationship for intellectual and social growth (Clarke-Stewart, 1973) and the evidence that family attitudes and characteristics help explain much of students' school performance (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfield, and York, 1966; Jencks, Smith, Ackland, Bane, Choen, Gintis, Heyns, and Michelson, 1972; Mayeske, 1973) provide a strong rationale for bringing parents into the educational process, especially low-income, poorly educated parents.

Implicit in this rationale for involving parents in instructional roles is a shift in emphasis in the direction of influence between parents and

schools. Whereas advisory councils are established to ensure meaningful input from parents into the schools, programs focusing on parent participation in instruction are usually set up to inform parents about appropriate teaching and learning strategies for their children. Instruction-oriented programs are also based on the notion that parents (as individuals) and schools are natural partners in the education of the parent's child. In contrast, decisionmaking models of participation presume that parents (as a group) and schools may have potentially conflicting interests, so that there is a need for formal mechanisms to ensure the representation of parents' interests and accountability for the district's and school's decisions.

In this section we review the findings of both the REA/Westat survey and the SRI case studies regarding the involvement of parents in the instructional process. Where data are available, we compare our findings with those of studies of Title I. We deal first with parents working with their own children and second with parent involvement in the schools.

Parents and Their Own Children Outside of School

Efforts to engage parents as tutors or active supporters of their own children's education are premised on the fact that no matter what goes on in the classroom, much of a child's educational performance is influenced by what he or she experiences outside of school--particularly in the home. Research has shown that schools are not powerless to affect the home environment and the relationship between parent and student. Evaluations of programs designed to help parents play a more active and constructive role in their child's education have shown significant effects on school achievement--at both the preschool (see Brofenbrenner, 1974, and Goodson and Hess, 1975, for a review of these studies) and elementary school (see Leller, 1983, for a review of this literature) levels--and on the ability of students to retain the resulting gains (Epstein, 1983). Moreover, studies have shown that programs that try to engage parents as helpers in their children's education also have positive effects on parents' attitudes toward the schools

(Duff, 1972; Epstein, 1983), on parents' teaching behaviors (Goodson and Hess, 1975), and on teachers' satisfaction with students' classwork (Duff, 1972; Epstein and Becker, 1982).

Because of the focus of the Title I and Chapter 1 legislation on the role of parents of participating students in programmatic decisions, many local administrators have been more concerned with the establishment of advisory councils and other mechanisms designed to ensure parental input than they have with involving parents in instruction (Melaragno et al., 1981). Research on Title I programs has found, however, that many districts have taken steps to involve parents more directly in the instruction of their own children. In their survey of 250 schools in 100 districts nationwide, Keesling and Melaragno (1983) reported that 27% involved parents of Title I children in activities designed to help them work as tutors in their own homes. In a series of 16 in-depth case studies undertaken as part of that same study, Melaragno and his colleagues found that 50% of the districts pursued some home-tutoring activities (Melaragno et al., 1981). Only 2 of these 16 districts had established formal programs to train parents for the tutoring role, however.

Data from the REA/Westat survey show that in an overwhelming majority of districts (84%), parents were involved in tutoring their children at home. (See Table V-1.) The survey data also show that most districts provided Chapter 1 parents with access to teachers and took steps to inform parents about ways they might work with their children at home.

Whether districts have stepped up their activities since the Title I/ Chapter 1 changeover is difficult to gauge. The data from the Keesling and Melaragno (1983) study are not directly comparable with those from the REA/Westat study. A number of administrators in the SRI case studies did note that the deletion of the requirement for advisory councils had freed them to focus more energy on programs designed to involve parents in the instructional process. We did not, however, uncover any major changes in districts' programs to involve parents as tutors that could be directly attributed to the changes in the legislation. In those cases where changes

Table V-1

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THEIR OWN CHILD'S EDUCATION

(Weighted Percentage of Districts; N = 1,274)

	Not Involved	Somewhat Involved	Substantially Involved	Don't Know/ Refused
Tutoring their children at home	14	67	17	3
Receiving information about how to assist their Chapter 1 children	7	51	41	1
Meeting with Chapter 1 teachers	9	53	36	2

did occur, they were driven by external factors--budget decreases causing layoffs of home-school liaisons, or increased state aid and technical assistance leading to the establishment of a new parent tutoring program, for example.

The survey results are limited in their description of the extent of parent involvement with their own children. To say that a majority of districts reported that parents worked as tutors of their own children does not mean that a majority of parents of Chapter 1 students played this role, or even that it happened in the majority of Chapter 1 schools in the district. Similarly, to say that a majority of districts informed parents of ways to assist their children does little to describe the extent or structure of these activities. Here the case study data are more informative.

Most of our case study sites had no structured, ongoing program to assist parents in helping their children at home, although a number of districts did run an occasional parent night or council meeting in which parents were provided information on how to help their children study. A smaller number of districts established regular training programs for parents. The most effective of these required regular participation and

included some kind of follow-up assistance, such as providing home-school liaisons who brought instructional materials into the parents' homes. A number of districts established parent lending libraries that parents could use to get suitable materials for reading to their children or performing other tutorial activities. One district had even established a computer-lending program, from which parents could borrow the same type of computers their children used in school to work at home.

Our case studies showed that parental involvement in their children's education was greatest in districts that took active steps to set up organized programs to train and assist parents. The districts with the most active parent tutoring programs were ones in which the district committed resources (including personnel) to establish programs that provided ongoing support for parents.

The survey data support this conclusion. Parents tended to be more involved in tutoring their children in districts that provided them with information on ways to assist their children, and in districts that had parent coordinators and district- and school-level advisory councils. (See Table V-2.) For example, parents were more than two times more likely to be

Table V-2

PARENT INVOLVEMENT AS TUTORS OF THEIR OWN CHILDREN, BY DISTRICT SUPPORT STRUCTURES

(Weighted Percentage of Districts)

	Had Parent Coordinator		Had DAC		Had One or More SACs	
	No (N=1082)	Yes (N=149)	No (N=630)	Yes (N=642)	No (N=695)	Yes (N=519)
Not involved	14	8*	15	12	15	12
Somewhat involved	69	52**	68	66	71	67
Substantially involved	15	40**	14	20*	12	19*
Don't know/refused	2	1**	3	2	2	3

*p < .05 (one-tailed test).

**p < .01 (one-tailed test).

"substantially involved" as tutors of their children if a district had a parent coordinator. Parent coordinators can assist parents in both their advisory and instructional roles. Organized and ongoing parent councils can be used for training and information sharing as well as for parent input. The last major study of Title I programs (Advanced Technology, Inc., 1983) found that advisory council members saw one of their main responsibilities as helping parents become more involved in their children's education.

The survey data also show that the ways in which districts inform parents about the Chapter 1 program are associated with the extent of parental home tutoring in the district. Table V-3 shows that the more active a district was--that is, the more structured and frequent steps that it took to inform parents--the more likely it was to report that parents were involved as tutors of their own children. It appears that districts that actively work to ensure that parents are aware of the Chapter 1 program and how it affects their children also take steps to support the involvement of parents in that educational process.

Table V-3

PARENT INVOLVEMENT AS TUTORS OF THEIR OWN CHILDREN,
BY HOW PARENTS ARE INFORMED ABOUT CHAPTER 1

(Weighted Percentage of Districts)

	Let School Decide or Relied on Parent-Teacher Meetings (N = 111)	Held Special Annual Meeting (N = 328)	Held Periodic Meetings or Used DACs/SACs (N = 815)
Not involved	19	15	11
Somewhat involved	67	71	66
Substantially involved	11	10	22**
Don't know/refused	2	3	2

**p < .01 (one-tailed test).

As was the case with our findings regarding the involvement of parents in decisionmaking, the extent of parental tutoring was positively associated with district size (enrollment). Larger districts tended to report more parent involvement in tutoring than smaller districts. But the relationships between district supportive structures and parent tutoring were consistent regardless of the size of the district.

Our case study data also showed that districts that created supportive structures for parents also had administrators with positive attitudes toward parent involvement in instructional roles. As one administrator noted, "parent participation is the cheapest and most effective way of increasing student achievement." In another district, administrators and teachers noted that their support for getting parents involved in their children's schoolwork was based on their successful "whole child" approach to compensatory education. Our survey data do not provide us with data on administrators' attitudes regarding the value of parental involvement in instructional roles.

Parents in the School

A second strategy educators use to involve parents more directly in the instructional process is to bring them into the school building. Here, parents may assist directly in the instructional process in the classroom (as either paid or volunteer aides), or they may provide teachers with administrative support--copying materials or collecting homework assignments, for example.

A central goal of bringing parents into the school is to increase the amount of adult/student interaction in the classroom. Parents directing a small group learning exercise and working with individual students can increase the amount of time students spend interacting with adults--and usually increase the amount of time teachers have for direct instructional activities. A second goal is to help parents understand better what goes on in the school. Regular interaction in the classroom can help parents overcome their own fear of schools (which for many low-income, poorly

educated parents represent a negative experience) and help them better comprehend the rationale underlying many school decisions.

The research on the use of parents in the schools is much more limited and more ambiguous than the research on the use of parents as tutors of their own children (Leller, 1983). One study found some positive gains in reading achievement in a group of children whose parents tutored them in the school building under the constant supervision of a certificated teacher (Murray, 1972). Another study reported positive results in a program that involved parents as tutors of their children both at home and in class (Woods, Barnard, and TeSelle, 1974). Melaragno and his colleagues (1981) found that teachers and administrators believed that the attitudes of both Title I parents and students improved when parents worked as instructional aides in the classroom. But Epstein's study (in press) of volunteer (mostly middle-class) parent participation found no effect on parental attitudes. In a series of studies in Australia, Toomey (n.d.) found that programs directed at bringing parents of all students into the schools actually increased the disadvantage that low-income parents had relative to their more advantaged peers. The inequality widened because middle-class parents acquired a better understanding of the schools while their disadvantaged counterparts did not. It should be noted, however, that neither of the studies that found no or negative effects of parent involvement in the school reported results from programs aimed exclusively at the participation of poor, disadvantaged parents.

The little information we have on the extent of parent participation in school-based Title I instructional activities comes from a nationwide survey of 250 schools in 100 districts carried out by Systems Development Corporation (Keesling and Melaragno, 1983). The authors reported that 60% of Title I schools employed instructional assistants in their classrooms, but in only 9% of the schools did these aides include parents of currently served students. The survey also showed that 14% of the schools used current parents as volunteer classroom aides. In 16 case studies carried out as part of the same project, 12 of the districts employed parents of Title I students as aides--but only a small percentage of these were parents of currently served students (Melaragno et al., 1981).

Our data on Chapter 1 from the REA/Westat survey show that although almost three-fourths (72%) of districts used aides in their compensatory education program, only 39% employed parents as aides. In 30% of districts, parents functioned as in-class aides; in 25% of districts, parents worked as aides outside the classroom. More than half of the districts (55%) reported that parents were involved "helping teachers." (See Table V-4.) The survey did not specify a definition of "parents," so it is not clear whether these figures reflect the activities of parents of currently enrolled Chapter 1 students or parents who had had children in the program at one time.

Table V-4

EXTENT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES DURING THE 1985-86 SCHOOL YEAR

(Weighted Percentage of Districts; N = 1,274)

Activity	Not at All Involved	Somewhat Involved	Substantially Involved	Don't Know/ Refused
Helping teachers	41	45	10	4
Serving as aides in the classroom	64	25	5	6
Serving as aides outside the classroom	67	22	3	8

The SRI case studies included a few sites with programs designed to bring parents into the schools to help in instruction. Yet, even in these districts with highly active parent programs, parents were rarely directly involved in the instructional process. Rather, parents usually provided administrative support. For example, in one highly active district, parents helped to run a compensatory math program. Their involvement consisted of putting together supplementary materials, correcting papers, and posting test results. These activities freed the teacher to spend her time instructing students. In another district, parents helped to put together all the bulletin boards in the school. A major exception to this pattern of involvement was one district that virtually mandated active participation twice a month by parents in a Chapter 1-funded preschool and kindergarten program.

Most districts in the SRI case studies used instructional aides. These aides usually worked in the classroom helping Chapter 1 students in one-on-one or small group settings. A few districts used aides outside of classes in administrative capacities. Although aides included parents of past or present Chapter 1 students in a number of districts, no district or school administrators considered the use of aides to be a conscious form of parent involvement. The use and hiring of instructional assistants was considered primarily a staffing issue.

As with parent tutoring of their children, parent participation in the schools tends to be associated with the efforts and attitudes of district and school personnel--such programs seem to succeed where the teachers and administrators value them and take steps to support them. In one extreme case, four of eight district staff had as their primary responsibility encouraging and coordinating parental involvement. The survey data show that parents were more likely to be involved in the schools if the district had other mechanisms to support involvement, such as parent coordinators and district- and school-level advisory councils. (See Table V-5.) The existence of parent coordinators is the factor most strongly associated with parent involvement in the schools. For example, 87% of districts with parent coordinators reported involvement of parents "helping teachers," compared with 52% of districts without parent coordinators.

The survey data also show that the ways in which districts inform parents about the Chapter 1 program are associated with the extent of parental involvement in the school's instructional process. (See Table V-6.) The more active a district was, that is, the more structured and frequent steps that it took to inform parents, the more likely it was to report that parents were involved in some instructional capacity in the schools.

Table V-5

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOLS, BY DISTRICT SUPPORT STRUCTURES

(Weighted Percentage of Districts)

	Had Parent Coordinator		Had DAC		Had One or More SACs	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Helping teachers						
Not involved	44	12**	49	35*	51	31**
Somewhat involved	43	61**	42	46**	41	48**
Substantially involved	9	26**	4	16*	5	15**
Don't know/refused	4	1**	6	3*	3	5
	(N=1082)	(N=149)	(N=630)	(N=642)	(N=695)	(N=519)
Serving as classroom aides						
Not involved	66	40**	66	64	70	58**
Somewhat involved	24	46**	24	24**	24	26**
Substantially involved	4	11**	3	6**	2	8**
Don't know/refused	6	3*	7	5	4	9*
	(N=1082)	(N=149)	(N=630)	(N=642)	(N=695)	(N=519)
Serving as aides outside the classroom						
Not involved	68	45**	69	65	73	62*
Somewhat involved	22	39**	21	24**	20	25**
Substantially involved	2	11*	1	5**	2	5**
Don't know/refused	8	5*	9	6	6	9
	(N=1082)	(N=149)	(N=630)	(N=642)	(N=695)	(N=519)

*p < .05 (one-tailed test).

**p < .01 (one-tailed test).

Table V-6

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOLS, BY HOW PARENTS WERE INFORMED ABOUT CHAPTER 1

(Weighted Percentage of Districts)

	Let School Decide or Relied on Parent-Teacher Meetings	Held Special Annual Meeting	Held Periodic Meetings or Used DACs/SACs
Helping teachers			
Not involved	61	51	31**
Somewhat involved	36	35	52**
Substantially involved	1	8	13**
Don't know/refused	3	6	4
	(N = 111)	(N = 328)	(N = 815)
Serving as classroom aides			
Not involved	73	72	59*
Somewhat involved	23	18	29*
Substantially involved	1	2	7**
Don't know/refused	3	8	5
	(N = 111)	(N = 328)	(N = 815)
Serving as aides outside the classroom			
Not involved	77	73	61*
Somewhat involved	19	19	25
Substantially involved	1	<1	5**
Don't know/refused	3	8	9
	(N = 111)	(N = 328)	(N = 815)

*p < .05 (one-tailed test).

**p < .01 (one-tailed test).

Summary

Perhaps the most telling finding of both the REA/Westat survey and the SRI case studies is that when Chapter 1 personnel choose to involve parents in instructional roles it is usually with their own children and outside the formal classroom setting. For example, whereas 84% of the districts reported that parents tutored their own children at home, only 30% reported that parents were involved as instructional aides in the classroom. In even fewer districts were parents involved as instructional aides outside the classroom.

The explanation for this difference lies in local educators' perceptions of the proper role of parents in the instructional process. Parents' helping their own children is considered an appropriate form of parent involvement. The use of noncertificated individuals in the school building is considered a personnel issue--not an issue of parent involvement. These studies, as well as previous studies of Title I (e.g., Melaragno et al., 1981), show that most noncertificated personnel in classrooms are paid aides. As employees of the district, these aides are subject to teachers' and administrators' authority and often undergo fairly regular training. Although many aides are or were at one time parents of eligible Title I or Chapter 1 students, they were hired because they were known to teachers and administrators or they had the proper qualifications, not because they were parents (Melaragno et al., 1981). Moreover, parents view aide positions as employment opportunities, not as ways of helping their children or learning more about the schools. Therefore, the length of their tenure as aides depends on factors besides their children's participation in the program. Consequently, most "parents" working as aides tend to be parents of former, not current, students.

These results also show that parents are more likely to be active in instructional roles--both in and outside of school--when the district takes active steps to inform and involve parents. The existence of district- and school-level advisory councils, regular meetings to inform parents about the Chapter 1 program, and the presence of a parent coordinator are all positively associated with the extent to which parents are involved in instruction-related activities.

VI CONCLUSIONS

In this report we examined parent involvement in local projects funded under Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981. Our analysis was based on data collected as part of the national assessment of Chapter 1 directed by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement. The primary data sources were a nationwide mail survey of district Chapter 1 directors (the REA/Westat survey) and 20 on-site case studies in 11 states (the SRI case studies). In this section we first describe what we have learned, and then we discuss the implications of our findings for federal policy.

Nature and Extent of Parent Involvement in Decisionmaking

Our study uncovered considerable variation in the extent to which parents play an active role as advisors on district decisions. Districts fell into one of several categories:

- Districts in which parents play an effective advisory role. In a small minority of districts, parents functioned with some independence from district administrators, and their ideas and suggestions had a measurable effect on the direction of the program.

- Districts in which parents are formally consulted, but do not have a substantive impact on program policy. In the majority of districts, parents were consulted in some form (through councils, meetings, or surveys). In some of these districts, parents were offered the opportunity to react to and even approve administrator decisions. In others, parents were simply informed of the general plans for the upcoming year and invited to ask questions. In neither case, however, is there evidence of parents' having a substantive impact on program policy.

- Districts in which parents are not formally consulted. Ten percent of districts fell into this category. These districts did not formally consult with parents through councils, meetings, or surveys. Instead, communication with parents took place primarily at the school level during parent-teacher conferences.

The general lack of substantive influence of parents on program decisions is due, in part, to constraints inherent in local project operations. The combination of federal and state regulations, financial restrictions, local styles of decisionmaking, and program tradition works to limit the influence of many actors in the local decisionmaking process, including teachers, administrators, and parents. Attempts to change the targeting of Chapter 1 funds, for example, are constrained by federal law, by resources, and by program tradition. Politically palatable changes in grade-level focus often require additional resources. Moreover, decisions that affect staffing arrangements are usually not considered to be within the province of parents.

The Effect of the Change from Title I to Chapter 1

To the extent that federal legislation has addressed the issue of parent involvement, it has focused on ensuring parents the opportunity to provide input into local project planning and implementation. The federal mandate in the Title I legislation that local districts establish parent advisory councils demonstrated this federal concern. The elimination of this requirement in Chapter 1 led to the abolition of parent councils in the majority of districts and schools. Whereas the overwhelming majority of districts (99%) and schools (84%) had councils during the later years of Title I, this study has shown that only 44% of districts and 38% of schools retained the councils in the absence of the federal mandate in Chapter 1.

The precipitous drop in the number of formal parent councils did not, however, translate directly into an equally drastic reduction in parent participation and influence in program decisions. Most districts fell into the following two categories:

- Districts that reported little or no change. In both our survey and case studies, most districts reported no change in parent involvement activities since the passage of Chapter 1. Many districts that reported dropping councils apparently had little effective parent involvement during Title I; the elimination of councils in these districts did not signal a change in parent influence because there had been none then and there was none now. At the same time, many districts chose to retain parent councils or found other mechanisms for effectively involving parents. In these districts, too, there was little change.

- Districts that reported a decrease in parent involvement. In a significant minority of districts (ranging from one-sixth to one-third), parent involvement has decreased since the passage of Chapter 1. One group of districts chose to eliminate their parent councils even though they had been somewhat active during Title I. Another group of districts retained their DAC but reduced its activities. A third group of districts maintained the DAC but cut down on school councils.

The Effect of State and Local Factors

In an attempt to understand why some districts enjoyed strong parent components while in others parents had little or no voice in program decisions, we examined a series of state and local factors. These included state guidelines and support, local staff attitudes, district institutional support, and characteristics of the communities.

State Factors

We found that state factors had only a minimal influence on local parent involvement activities. In our case study sites we found that one state's requirement that districts maintain a district council or an acceptable alternative had caused local agencies to create formal council mechanisms in which parents of Chapter 1 students could participate. In general, however, few states have guidelines concerning parent involvement that are more restrictive than the federal government's, and few states provide significant technical assistance in this area. We would, then, expect to find only a minimal influence.

Local Factors

In contrast, local factors appeared to be much more influential. We found parent components to be strongest and parents to be more influential in districts in which administrators held positive attitudes about the value of parent participation, where administrators structured formal channels for communication about the Chapter 1 program with parents, and where the district spent funds on supportive structures for parent involvement, such as councils and parent coordinators. In general, these districts tended to have

long histories of active parent and community involvement. They were most often located in large urban areas with relatively high concentrations of minority group members. In these districts, the Chapter 1 program frequently had a high level of political importance, especially in poor and minority neighborhoods where the funds were targeted.

Parents and Instruction

Parents may play a role (other than as program advisors) as educational partners, both at home--as tutors and supporters of their children--and in the school--as paid or volunteer instructional assistants or as general helpers to school staff. Although the involvement of parents in an advisory role remains problematic in many districts, parents often are involved in tutoring their children at home. On the other hand, parents are even less likely to serve as aides in the classroom than they are to participate in local program design. Below, we discuss the role of parents as partners in the educational process.

Congress has never mandated an instructional role for parents in local Title I or Chapter 1 projects. Because of the importance of the home environment for school achievement, however, educators have long sought to develop effective programs to bring parents (especially low-income, poorly educated parents) into the instructional process. Studies of Title I showed that many districts ran programs designed to engage parents in their children's learning, and our data show that this practice has continued under Chapter 1. We were not able to determine, however, whether districts are focusing more or less energy on involving parents in instruction now that the mandates for advisory councils have been eliminated.

Districts were much more likely to involve parents as tutors with their own children at home than they were to bring parents into the classroom to assist in the instructional process. Whereas 84% of the districts in the REA/Westat survey reported that parents worked with their own children as tutors, only 30% said that parents functioned as in-class aides.

Parents' assisting their own children at home, either tutoring them or making sure they have a quiet place to work and that they actually do their work, is considered an appropriate and effective role--especially for poor and uneducated parents. In contrast, administrators and teachers are much less likely to encourage actively the involvement of parents in the classroom. Administrators see the use of noncertificated individuals in the schools as a personnel issue--not really one of parent involvement. Districts that use instructional aides have usually done so for a long time. They have established specific requirements and training for aides, as well as formal procedures for hiring noncertificated personnel. Although many aides are or were parents of Title I/Chapter 1 students, they were hired because school personnel knew them through their volunteer work in the schools, not because they were parents.

As was the case with the involvement of parents in advisory roles, we found that parents were more likely to be involved in the instructional process--both in and outside of school--when district and school personnel had positive attitudes about the value of parent participation and when the district and schools took active steps to inform and involve parents. The existence of district- and school-level parent councils, regular meetings to inform parents about the Chapter 1 program, and the presence of a parent coordinator were all positively associated with the extent to which parents were involved in instruction-related activities.

Policy Implications

This study's findings underscore the limits of federal policy. The mandate that local districts and schools establish councils for parents of students served by the Title I program resulted in the formation of such councils in nearly all districts and schools. The elimination of the mandate for councils in the Chapter 1 program resulted in the abolition of parent councils in a majority of districts and schools. In contrast, federal requirements for parent participation have had a much less uniform effect on the nature of parent activities at the local level and on the influence of those activities on local projects. Whereas federal law may be able to

determine how local projects structure parent involvement activities, what really goes on at the local level appears to be more a function of local factors. Consequently, the nature of parent activities differs a great deal among districts.

The relative importance of local factors does not mean that federal actions have no effect on how parents are involved at the local level. In particular, the history of federal commitment to parent involvement, the ambiguous signal sent by the elimination of the strict parent involvement mandates, and the extent of material support all can influence the nature of parent activities at the local level.

- History. In the districts in which parents remain actively involved in local projects, their participation was first structured and facilitated by federal mandates--although now it may be driven more by local factors. It is unlikely that as many districts and schools initially would have developed active parent components (including involving parents in evaluation, needs assessments, and program design decisions) if it were not for the history of federal concern and support for parent involvement.

- Federal signals. The importance of this historical commitment to parent involvement underscores the potentially effective symbolic role of the federal government. Through a decade and a half, Washington had sent the signal to local and state educational agencies that the participation of parents was a key ingredient in running a "good" Title I program. After 1982, many state, district, and school personnel received the opposite message: parents are no longer important. Parents and administrators in many of our case study sites that experienced decreases in parent involvement after 1982 noted that the Chapter 1 law had communicated the lack of a national concern for the meaningful participation of parents.

- Federal support. A third way the federal government has an effect on local practice is through material support. Activities like parent involvement exist at the margins of local projects--they are necessarily considered secondary to the provision of instructional services. Funding levels that are not on a par with inflation force districts to cut services. It is these marginal activities that are the first to go--as we found in a number of our case study sites. But material support need not be confined to funds. In a few of our case study sites, state provision of technical assistance was useful to districts in creating more effective parent involvement components.

Potential Federal Policies

Given the limits of federal influence, what might the federal government do to enhance the participation of parents in local Chapter 1 projects? Our findings suggest that federal policy initiatives must be based on two simple facts about parent involvement. The first is that parent involvement components are difficult to establish and maintain. The second is that they work only if there is a great deal of local support.

Engaging the parents of Chapter 1 students in the educational process--whether in the classroom, at home with their own children, or in an advisory capacity--is an extremely problematic undertaking in many districts. The fact that many parents of Chapter 1 students are poorly educated and frequently have competing time commitments with work and family militates against their effective participation in local projects. Consequently, the development of strong parent programs requires a great deal of effort on the part of Chapter 1 personnel. Unfortunately, district and school staff are frequently overworked and have little extra time to put into parent involvement activities. The question, then, becomes one of what steps the federal government might take to facilitate local support for parent involvement activities.

Our research suggests a few potential steps: clarifying the federal government's commitment to parent involvement, clarifying federal goals with respect to parent involvement, providing technical support, funding local-level training of parents and staff, requiring district planning, and ensuring local accountability in the area of parent involvement.

- Clarify federal commitment. The first and perhaps most important step the government could take is to send a strong signal about the importance of parent involvement in federal eyes. For over a decade, Washington communicated to state and local educational agencies the necessity of involving parents of Title I students in an advisory role. Beginning in 1981 with the passage of Chapter 1 and continuing through the Technical Amendments in November 1983 and the Secretary's Regulations in May 1986, the federal signal has been an ambiguous one, leading many local administrators to believe that parent involvement is no longer important. At this point, federal actions through the reauthorization process may have as significant a value for what they symbolically communicate as for what they substantively mandate or encourage. Whether district and school personnel see parent

involvement as a necessary ingredient of a successful compensatory education effort will depend in part on their perception of this federal signal.

- Clarify federal goals with respect to parent involvement. Congress has never mandated an instructional role for parents in either the Title I or Chapter 1 legislation, although other federal education programs (e.g., Head Start) have required the involvement of students' parents in the instructional process. Instead, the focus of the Title I/Chapter 1 legislation has been to ensure parents an opportunity to comment on local program plans or progress. In addition to sending a strong signal about the importance of parent involvement, federal policymakers need to address the type of involvement they expect in local projects--whether parents should be involved as tutors of their children, working in the classroom, in a general advisory role, or all three.

- Technical support. Even in districts where administrators and teachers are committed to involving parents, they are often at a loss for effective ways to work with parents. The federal government could take two specific steps to provide useful assistance to districts as they attempt to develop meaningful parent involvement components. The first would be to fund state education agencies to provide technical assistance to local districts. Such a step would most likely require an increase in the amount of funds provided to state education agencies. Given the reduction most states experienced in 1982 when the state set-aside was reduced from 1.5% to 1.0%, many states have had to cut back on their assistance to local districts.

  The second step would involve the collection and dissemination of information on effective parent involvement practices. Such an activity would be consistent with previous programs run by the Secretary to award and disseminate information on exemplary programs.

- Parent-teacher training programs. Although many teachers are naturally able to work well with students' parents, few are trained to do so. Similarly, few Chapter 1 parents are trained to work effectively in the schools. Providing local districts with federal funds to spend on parent and teacher training appears to be another potentially effective way of fostering more parent involvement. Given the present fiscal constraints within which most districts function, however, this step would require new funds if it were not to result in a reduction of direct instructional services.

- District plans. Districts and schools with effective parent involvement programs have clearly planned for them. A minimal requirement could be the inclusion in districts' applications of a section detailing a comprehensive plan for involving parents in the program.

- Ensuring accountability. A final step the federal government could take would be to establish mechanisms to ensure that local districts undertook meaningful parent involvement activities. The requirement for a parent involvement plan in districts' applications to their state education agencies would be the first step in this direction. These plans might also be required to include a parent and staff training component and to be developed in collaboration with parents of Chapter 1 students. A final requirement would be to mandate that state monitoring of local projects include an evaluation of parent programs. Such actions would continue to allow local projects flexibility in structuring parent programs according to local needs, while ensuring that districts focus attention on and develop specific plans regarding parent participation.

Summing up, our data suggest that the federal government cannot mandate meaningful cooperation between parents and schools through legislative fiat. Yet without a strong federal commitment, both symbolically and materially, many teachers, administrators, and parents will be left without the necessary support to create effective components that bring schools and parents closer together.

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TECHNICAL APPENDIX

The estimated means and percentages from the REA/Westat survey presented in the text and tables are based on data weighted to represent the population of school districts nationwide. The sample sizes (Ns) presented in the tables reflect the actual number of survey respondents for an item (i.e., they are based on the unweighted data).

Standard errors for the estimated means and percentages were estimated using the formula for the variance of domain (i.e., subpopulation) means from stratified random samples in William Cochran, 1963, Sampling Techniques, New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., pp.148-149.

$$v(\hat{\bar{Y}}_j) \doteq \frac{1}{\hat{N}_j^2} \sum_h \frac{N_h^2(1-f_h)}{n_h(n_h-1)} \left[\sum_i (y_{hij} - \bar{y}_{hj})^2 + n_{hj}\left(1 - \frac{n_{hj}}{n_h}\right)(\bar{y}_{hj} - \hat{\bar{Y}}_j)^2 \right]$$

where

$v(\hat{\bar{Y}}_j)$ = the variance of the mean of y in domain j.

$\hat{N}_j$ = the estimated population in domain j given by:

$$\hat{N}_j = \sum_h \frac{N_h}{n_h} n_{hj}$$

N_h = the population in stratum h

n_h = the sample in stratum h

y_{hij} = the value of the variable y for person i in stratum h and domain j

n_{hj} = the sample size in stratum h and domain j

$\bar{y}_{hj}$ = the mean of y in stratum h and domain j

$\hat{\bar{Y}}_j$ = is the estimated mean of y given by:

$$\hat{\bar{Y}}_j = \frac{\hat{Y}_j}{\hat{N}_j} = \frac{\sum_h \frac{N_h}{n_h} \sum_i y_{hij}}{\sum_h \frac{N_h}{n_h} n_{hj}}$$

In implementing these formulas, the finite population correction (1 - f) was ignored because we are interested in whether the means differ between these types of subpopulations. We know that in any finite population the means will differ. The formulas implicitly allow for missing data in that the mean for a missing case is assumed to be the same as for the other cases in its stratum and domain. Situations did arise where there were no observations in the sample for particular combinations of stratum and domain, although there were cases in the population as a result of the item sampling. These cells were assumed to have the overall domain mean.

Significance tests of the differences between the domain means were based on a chi square statistic with J-1 degrees of freedom, where J is the number of domains:

$$\text{chi square} = \sum_{j=1}^{J} (\hat{\bar{Y}}_j - \bar{Y})^2 / v(\hat{\bar{Y}}_j)$$

where $\bar{j}$ = the estimate of the overall mean of Y. When J is 2, this is equivalent to a t-test.

Significance tests were based on significance levels of 5% and 1%. One-tailed tests were used for comparisons in which there was a strong prior belief that differences could occur in only one direction.

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